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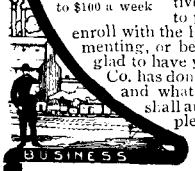

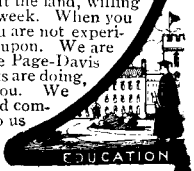

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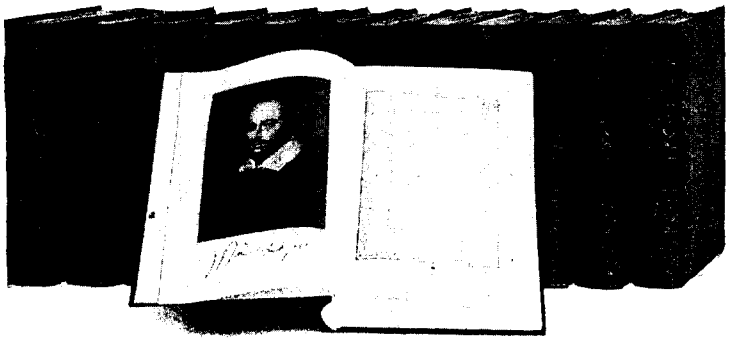

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Vol. XLV. JULY, 1904. No. 4.

A STRANGE TRICK OF FATE.

BY FREDERICK R. BURTON.

An expedition into the wilderness that witnessed a clash of wills and brought forth awkward situations for all its members.

(*Complete in This Issue.*)

CHAPTER I.

OPENING THE MAIL.

SOME years ago, a dozen at the most, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company built a new siding in the wilderness north of the Great Lakes, that vast region where a railroad seems an anachronism, where the white population is limited to the factors at Hudson Bay Company trading posts and the dwellers in widely separated pioneer settlements along the line of the road.

The siding was placed without any regard whatever to present or future population, its purpose being originally nothing more than a convenience to the running of trains upon the single track. As a certain west-bound train was scheduled to halt there and wait on the siding till a certain east-bound train had passed, the place had to have a name for reference in the company's despatches; and as the road crosses the little Pahquatasing a short distance from the siding, the place was called after the river; but no station was erected, not so much as a switchman's hut, for no switchman was condemned to exile there.

It was the business of the engineer of the west-bound train to stop short of the switch, and of one of the trainmen to run forward and throw it.

Even at that time there were a few, a very few, farms within a half day's wagon journey in both directions from the siding; and there was a rude, generally passable trail, called by courtesy a road, that connected them.

It happened that a restless Yankee, who already had broken into the wilderness as a pioneer three times in as many different States or territories in his own country, went journeying across the continent by short stages, or as much at a time as could be made by daylight, and noted the stationless, all but nameless, stopping place.

He had to ask a brakeman what it was called, for the name was not on the long list of towns in his time-table. Jim Foster, that was the Yankee's name, told the conductor that he would stop over at the next town, whatever it might be, and his ticket was endorsed accordingly.

With the exception of one hour, he spent all of a long day in driving over the trail that connected the farms. That hour was put in at the siding.

The result of his observations may be astonishing to those who do not know the ways of the wilderness. Going back to the settlement where he had hired his horse and wagon, he announced that he wanted to employ men "for a spell."

"If I can't get enough men," said he, "I'll fill in with Indians."

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He got both. They hauled a quantity of unseasoned lumber from the mill at the settlement to Pahquatasing, and in short order put up a cubical structure one story in height, but with the front end carried by a sham boarding to the height of a second story.

While this was building, the Indians broke a road from the siding to the trail referred to, about a quarter of a mile north of the railway. The new building was placed a short stone's throw from the switch.

Before it or the road was finished, in fact just as soon as the sham front was up, the Yankee knocked together a ladder, took paint pot and brush, and with his own hand inscribed the following on the front, in letters two feet high:

J. Foster.
GENERAL STORE.

The calicoes, canned goods, tools, crockery, overalls, shoes and other miscellany that constitute the stock of a general store arrived before the carpenters' rubbish had been removed.

It was the first call a train had made for any such purpose at Pahquatasing, and the second call was made the day following, when a passenger left the west-bound train that regularly took the siding, and had his trunk put off.

This was one George Bagley, to whom Foster had written on the evening of the day when he decided to found the town of Pahquatasing.

Bagley looked the ground over, saw several farms in the forest surrounding the general store, saw a mill site at the river, saw a railroad station, and immediately arranged to employ Foster's men when he was through with them to put up a hotel across the road from the store.

Within a year from that time Pahquatasing had forty inhabitants.

There was a saw mill and a railroad station with an agent in charge. Several acres of cleared land were turning into farms. Three dwelling houses sheltered a fraction of the population, and the rest lived at the Pahquatasing Hotel, George Bagley proprietor.

All traded and passed the evenings at J. Foster's general store, whither also came the farmers from both directions, with eggs and butter to exchange for Foster's miscellany and Bagley's whisky.

In due course a post-office was established in the general store, and transient guests were not unknown at the hotel. Now and again a commercial traveler spent the night with Bagley and sold goods to Foster.

Amateur sportsmen from the States often made the place a point of departure for hunting and fishing expeditions, and prospectors of one kind and another were forever straggling along. Bagley entertained them all, and Foster sold them what they lacked in the way of outfit and provisions.

The first summer of the twentieth century found Pahquatasing with eleven dwellings, the general store correspondingly prosperous, and the hotel running full.

There were new pioneers staying there while their acres were clearing, and transients never were so plentiful. Three had been at the house for a week.

"If those fellows hang on much longer," said Bagley to Foster, "I shall have to double the size of the hotel."

The early morning mail had just come in, and Bagley had strolled across the road to get what there might be for him and his people.

"There's your whisky bill," replied Foster, handing over a letter that Bagley took without comment. "Papers for Macdonald and Stewart, and two letters for your transients."

Bagley took the mail and leaned against the counter for a bit of gossip. There was no hurry. Macdonald and Stewart, one an employee at the saw mill, the other a pioneer, had gone to work, and the transients had not yet come down to breakfast.

"Your transients going to stay all summer?" asked Foster, as seriously as if he meant it.

"No," replied Bagley, in the same tone, "they're only waiting for Don Robertson to find 'em guides. Then they're going to start into the bush."

"Oh! that's it, eh? Sportsmen?"

"That don't seem to be their outfit."

"Looking for timber belts, mebbe."

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"Yes, mebbe, and that's as far as you can get with 'em, Jim. They're a close-mouthed lot—not that that's anything against 'em. They're good customers for me, and well enough as the run of travelers goes."

"When they first come," said Foster, "I thought that Mr. Mayberry was a rich young feller out in the woods for his health, he was so white and thin; but darned if he ain't the liveliest one of the lot."

"So he is. This is the first morning since he's been here that he hasn't gone for a walk before breakfast. Pleasant sort of man, though quiet. He's no kicker, which p'r'aps is natural, seeing that he ain't the head of the party."

"Mr. Colburn holds up that end, don't he?"

"Yes; he seems to take some fun out of letting it be known that he runs the outfit, but Stilson pays the bills. Kind of funny combination, but they've got a right to keep their business to themselves, and I don't care."

With this magnanimous admission, Bagley gathered himself up and strolled back to the hotel.

He laid the papers and letters on a table in the office, as he called the one general apartment of the house, and then glanced into the dining-room. The table was freshly laid.

"I'll have to rout those fellows out," he muttered, and started to the stairs, only to see his three guests coming down.

"Good morning, gents," said he; "breakfast's all ready for you."

Mr. Mayberry responded with a cordial "Good morning, Mr. Bagley," Stilson contented himself with an indifferent "Howdy," and Colburn passed with an almost invisible nod. It was all the same to the landlord, though he noted the difference.

"There's letters for you in the office," added Bagley.

Stilson, being nearest the door, was the first in. He glanced at the letters and went on to the dining-room.

"As I've got no girl to write to me," he said, "I don't expect any letters after the day when we should have left this God-forsaken place."

The other two arrived at the table at the same time, and each took up a letter. Each displayed interest, surprise, and perhaps something else at the very sight of the envelope he held.

Mayberry was quick to hand to the other the letter he had picked up, for it was addressed to "Mr. John A. Colburn" in a strongly characteristic, feminine hand.

Colburn was slower about the exchange. He took his own letter, but held the other, looking at it as if it were necessary that he should read forward and backward the "Mr. Howard Mayberry" that constituted the most important part of the address. Then he looked at his own, and his face flushed.

"This is yours," said he shortly, handing Mayberry's letter across the table.

Mayberry's face flushed, too, when he took it, and the eyes of the two men met in a swift glance of deep and complex significance. Each of the letters bore the same postmark, and were addressed in the same characteristic, feminine hand.

"Thank you," said Mayberry quietly.

He put his letter in a pocket and went to the dining-room.

Colburn stared after him a moment with a puzzled frown, and then hastily tore open the envelope of his letter and read eagerly.

The flush died away from his face and the frown of perplexity lingered. At the end of the letter the frown deepened, and after looking hard at the signature he read again from the beginning.

This time, though no flush returned the frown gradually cleared. He looked toward the door through which Mayberry had gone, put away his letter, and followed with firm tread.

By the time he came to the door there was a broad smile betokening satisfaction on his face. He kept it there all through breakfast with occasional intervals of unwonted jocularity.

Mayberry seemed unaffected by it, but Stilson was moved to comment.

"Great Scott!" quoth he, "if a letter stirs you up so, what would be the result if she were to come on? If her presence would make you steadily

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agreeable, by all means telegraph her to take the next train."

Colburn haw-hawed as if this sally amused him to the very depths of his being. Mayberry's attention seemed to be concentrated on his coffee cup.

"A few days' further delay won't matter any," added Stilson discontentedly. "As you've managed to get us stuck here indefinitely, you might as well scare up a parson—there must be one somewhere in the wilderness—put in your honeymoon at Pahquatasing, and let us begin our work next year."

There was allusion in this calculated under ordinary conditions to affect Colburn disagreeably. Indeed, his eyes glinted resentfully, just a flash, but his hilarious humor held sway and he laughed again.

"Cheer up, Stilson," said he: "you may get a letter some day. Many a woman has put up with a worse looking man than you are. There's a chance for you yet."

At this distance of time, and in knowledge of subsequent events, it seems fairly certain that Colburn's confident jocularity was put on for the benefit of the man who had received a letter in the same feminine hand. Let us see if the letter itself justified him.

"Dear Mr. Colburn," it began, "I cannot bring myself to wound your feelings by saying a positive no to the question you asked me just before you went away. Neither can I please you by saying yes. I am in painful doubt, and you would not want me to say yes unless I was sure.

"I esteem you as a friend and want always to be your friend. It seems a dreadful pity that the human heart is such, or shall I limit it and admit that it is a woman's heart that is so prone to indecision? I am trying to say that I am sorry I could not give you a definite answer, and now I fear that I have delayed this word so long that it will not reach you before you return from your perilous journey. If it does reach you, please understand that I shall think of you every day, hoping for your success and safety, and that I shall want to see you when you return. Until then I give you at least this promise, that I will not say yes to any other."

There was more in a pleasant, friendly spirit, and the letter was signed, "Rose Osborne."

"I hope Robertson will come to-day," said Mayberry, at a lull in Colburn's jocularity.

Stilson responded at once with fervent curses on a country where one heard from New York more speedily than from the nearest village.

"Robertson," said he, "may have sunk in a bog or been scalped by Indians. We may stick here all summer, and be none the wiser. He ought to send us some sort of word."

"It never occurs to a man like Robertson," responded Colburn, "that there is such a thing as time, or lack of it. He went away to find us guides. When he gets them he'll come in with them. That will be time enough, as he understands it."

"And meantime his wages run on at so much *per diem*."

"Oh, well——"

"It isn't well!" interrupted Stilson sharply. "We haven't got unlimited money. I'm not here to stand for waste, and a good deal of this is unnecessary expense. You might have made arrangements for guides before leaving Montreal. The C. P. R. people would have fixed it for you."

Mayberry rose and left the room. The conversation had come to its accustomed stage, and he cared neither to take part in it nor listen to it.

He could share Stilson's disappointment at the delay, could admit that there had been blunders in the preparations, but it was now too late to wipe out past errors by anything except fresh endeavor. Moreover, he was inclined, when he faced the impossible, to shrug his shoulders and waste no words about it.

To start without guides was impossible; therefore, why debate the thing acrimoniously?

So he quietly left the room, and perhaps it was more to the point that he had not yet read his own letter. To be free from interruption or observation, he went to his chamber.

His fingers shook a little as he carefully tore off an end of the envelope.

"Dear Mr. Mayberry," his letter be-

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gan, "I cannot bring myself to wound your feelings by saying a positive no to the question you asked me just before you went away," and so forth.

Word for word, the letter was an exact duplicate of that addressed to Colburn, with one exception. Miss Rose did not include in her letter to Mayberry that sentence about not saying "yes to any other," but he did not know the difference, and the last thing that would have occurred to him was the fact that the young lady had written a substantially identical letter to her rival lovers.

Mayberry did not smile as he read and reread the sheet.

He derived no profound satisfaction from Miss Rose's manifestly sincere declarations of friendship. There was a painful pleasure in gazing at her handwriting, in realizing that these gracious words were addressed to him; and for such reasons the letter was put carefully away, where it might be referred to readily, and where it would be safe from loss: but there was no stimulus to jocularity in it.

On the contrary, unable to shut his memory to the fact that the other man had received a letter from the same person, he found it difficult to suppress the bitterness he knew to be the breeding place of jealousy and hostility.

CHAPTER II.

A BELATED TELEGRAM.

BAGLEY'S transients constituted an exploring expedition sent out by a syndicate of Eastern capitalists to hunt for mining locations. It was taken for granted that they would come upon an abundance of copper in that region, possibly silver, and perhaps gold.

They planned to search in hitherto unexplored lands, of which there are large tracts in middle Canada. There is many a lake there that has not yet been seen by a white man.

It was an ill-assorted trio, which may be accounted for by the fact that they had not been brought together by their own wills or inclinations. The idea was Colburn's.

He had roughed it somewhat on the Western plains of the United States, and this gave him an advantage of at least alleged experience. Colburn never had been a miner, but he had been in mining camps, and was of an adventurous disposition.

Coming to New York from a leisurely railway journey through Canada, he had begun at once to talk mines to such rich men as he knew, telling them with great emphasis and perfect sincerity what he had heard and seen of Canada's mineral resources.

There were fortunes hidden in the woods up there, and he knew it. Persistence usually bears its fruit, and in this instance the fruit was the expedition under his charge.

A number of men put up small sums each to pay the costs of exploration. Stilson went along as their direct representative. He carried the money and paid the bills, and was keenly alive to the responsibilities of his position.

He had never met Colburn until they were introduced in New York by one of the members of the syndicate.

Mayberry was but a year from a post-graduate study of geology at Harvard. During that year he had been instructor in physics at an academy whose pupils included Harry, son of the wealthy William F. Osborne. It had been in Mayberry's way to be of special service to the boy, and a friendship stronger than is usual between teacher and pupil sprang up between them.

So it came about in a perfectly natural manner that Mayberry spent a part of the holidays as a guest of the Osbornes, on which occasion he met Harry's sister Rose. It was all up with him from the first moment, but he did not declare himself tilll nearly half a year had passed.

Meantime the syndicate had been formed and William F. Osborne had joined it.

He it was who suggested that Mayberry be commissioned to go with the expedition as the scientific member. The young instructor accepted the commission with enthusiasm that was by no means less because it provided for a summer that might otherwise have been decidedly short, financially considered.

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Each member of the expedition had a share in the prospective profits of the enterprise.

Colburn, as the originator, was to have a larger share than the others, but the possibilities for Mayberry were so bright, granting that they found locations of value, that he felt that he could properly make his passion known to Rose, and ask her to marry him. He had spoken in a manly way, admitted frankly his dependence upon the results of the expedition for means to set up a home of even the most modest description; and she had said neither yea nor nay, but she had, with apparently equal frankness, assured him that her lover's means, real or prospective, would have nothing to do with her decision.

Circumstances about this time gave him intimation that Colburn, whom he had but recently met, was prospecting matrimonially in the same quarter, and the same circumstances opened Colburn's eyes to a possible rival in the quiet man of science.

Of course nothing passed openly between them on the subject, and the receipt by each of a letter from Miss Rose was the first certain information either had of the other's relation to her.

The trio had arrived imperfectly equipped at Pahquatasing because Colburn had been so certain that there they would find guides and camp-helpers tumbling over each other for opportunity of employment. He had observed several Indians and some apparently idle whites at the station when his train called there months before.

Moreover, he had learned that the village was the point of departure for many amateur sportsmen who were ambitious to push to unknown parts of the wilderness.

He had failed to take into account *the shifting nature of the population*; the fact that at any time the inauguration of a new enterprise was calculated to empty a dozen villages.

In this instance all the Indians he had seen there were with a surveying party two hundred miles distant, and not a white was left but was up to his neck with work. Even Don Robertson was busy, so Bagley informed Colburn.

This man, Donald Robertson, had been a Hudson Bay Company factor, and why he was no longer in the employ of that conservative company was to be attributed to nothing more serious than his love of the very wilds wherein his services were wanted.

Scotch by name and by the greater part of his ancestry, he was Indian by nature. There was in his features many a bold suggestion of the Indian strain that was said to be in his blood. He never admitted the taint, but it was undoubtedly there.

A great hunter and wanderer was Don Robertson. Before he was thirty-five he had killed more than a hundred moose, and after that number he stopped counting.

"And not one of them, sir," he would say, "for mere purposes of sport. All for necessity."

He knew the country as well as did any Indian; spoke Ojibway fluently, and could "get along" in any of the numerous Indian dialects of the woods; was as much at home on the water as on the land, and yet never had seen a rowboat.

Such a man could not possibly be content to trade company stuff for the pelts the Indians brought in; to keep himself cooped up in a post, with not more than a county or two to roam in; and so at last the company reluctantly removed itself as an obstacle to his desire for wandering, which is a delicate way of saying that Robertson was dismissed from its employ.

From that time he had hunted, guided hunters, attempted spasmodically to break a farm out of the wilderness, and now was engaged, in the interests of his rather large family, in just that-undertaking at Pahquatasing.

The family was temporarily installed in a shack constructed of several poles, a few waste slabs from the mill, a minimum of canvas and a maximum of thatch—the family always had been thus installed since its oldest member could recall—with open air kitchen and mother earth for bedstead; and Robertson was hewing the logs destined to be the foundation of a square house when the Colburn expedition arrived.

Bagley advised Colburn to see Robertson.

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"Don's pretty busy," said the landlord; "he's trying to settle down, and probably won't go with you at any price; he's swore that he'll never go out with a party till he's got his folks housed and comfortable, but he can tell you where Indians are to be had. He knows more than all the rest of the town put together about that sort of thing, which might not be saying much, for the rest of us don't know a dummed thing. But Don knows it all, and if you could have the luck to get him as your head guide, you'd have the best man in that line in all Canada."

Colburn sought for Robertson with the fixed intention of making him the head guide; and so successful was Colburn ordinarily in having his way that he had come to regard such an intention as much the same thing as an accomplished fact.

His persistence was untiring when obstacles presented themselves, and he masked the irritation they caused so successfully that he was often referred to as a man of extraordinary patience; but once his purpose was accomplished, and it was merely a matter of administering an undertaking, his subordinates would seldom suspect that he and patience were acquainted.

Robertson desisted hewing and leaned on his ax when Colburn accosted him and began to talk about a trip.

"How many are there?" asked the woodsman.

"Three."

"Ye'll want a man for each."

"Certainly; you and a couple of good Indians."

"And three canoes."

He had an odd way of pronouncing this word with the accent strongly on the first syllable.

"Yes," replied Colburn; "canoes are to be had here, I suppose?"

"No, there's none in the place."

"Except your own, you mean."

"I sold mine to a party that went up to Pahquatasing Lake for fishing."

"Do you mean to say you haven't one for your own use?"

"Yes; I'm done with camping. I've got to build this house."

So saying, Robertson took up his ax.

"Well," said Colburn, with no sign of disappointment, "Bagley says you can tell me where to get guides."

"I dunno"—the ax went down again; "there's an Indian village about twenty miles up from here, and another thirty miles further. Might be a man or two in either place. But they're mostly busy this time of year."

Then Colburn made rather a long speech. Without stating the precise purpose of the expedition, he intimated that it was important for him and his companions to traverse a country not yet explored by whites; that they needed just such a man as Robertson, because none of them had had experience in dealing with Indians; and he hinted that money was no object.

"Of course," Colburn concluded, "if you're out of it, I'm sorry, but I'd like to have you name a man who will be your equal for the purpose. And I'll be glad to pay you well for finding that man and engaging him for us."

Robertson stood listening, with one foot on the ground, the other on the log; he rested an elbow on the bent knee and his fingers unwittingly curved around the handle of an imaginary paddle.

The deep scent of far-away pines filled his greedy nostrils. He seemed to see the eyes of a startled but not frightened stag taking his first look at a human being. Impertinent squirrels chased over his feet, and beneath his boot glowed the soft phosphorescence of a forest centuries dead.

"I'm thinking you do need a good man," said he vacantly.

Colburn's battle was won. It was not the suggestion of pay that interrupted the work on Robertson's house; it was the temptation of the journey itself.

The unknown forest called to this man of the wilds in a tone that he could not resist.

So the ax was flung aside and that very day Robertson set forth to pick up Indians and canoes. He had been gone long, more than a week, and no word had been received from him, but he returned on the day when Colburn and Mayberry received their identical letters.

With him were two Indians, which

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was promising of an immediate start; but there were only two canoes.

"Have you made up your mind that we can get along with two?" asked Colburn.

"No," replied Robertson, "we'll have to have another."

"Where can you get it?"

"Make it."

Stilson fell at once to grumbling. More time wasted, doubtless more expense. Certainly the wages of Robertson and the Indians must go on during all the process of manufacture. All of which might have been avoided if Colburn had taken ordinary precautions.

"Well," exclaimed Colburn, exasperated, "why not make the best of it? We've got to have the canoe, and the less words wasted over it the quicker we'll get it. Go ahead, Robertson; slap her together as fast as you can."

"It won't take so very long," said Robertson; "we stopped this morning and stripped a tree for the bark, which we've got with us, and Mukwa brought the caribou thongs with him from home."

Mukwa was one of the Indians. His full name was Gitchemukwa, meaning Great Bear, but it was never used even by his tribes people.

He was a small, slender man, probably about fifty years old, but his age was not to be inferred from his appearance. The whites put him down as somewhere in the thirties until one day he casually mentioned his granddaughter, when they revised their estimate.

The other Indian, Takumegezhik, was certainly younger. His name, signifying Clouded Sky, was promptly abbreviated to Gezhik. Both spoke English, Mukwa fluently, if incorrectly, Gezhik slowly, and with considerable uncertainty. Mukwa was forever smoking; Gezhik sometimes went for an hour without lighting up.

They were industrious fellows in their way, Mukwa toiling steadily, but with a moderation of movement that drove Colburn and Stilson frantic with irritation; but Mukwa was a race horse compared with Gezhik.

Robertson worked with the Indians at canoe making, and the summer was but little older when it was ready. So one fine morning the expedition actually started, Colburn and Robertson in one canoe, Stilson and Gezhik in another, Mayberry and Mukwa bringing up the rear.

Their first objective was Lake Pahquatasing, which they reached by paddling up the river, a short day's journey.

This lake lies upon the height of land and has two outlets. One, the river of the same name that finds its devious way to Lake Superior; the other, a channel connecting with another lake further north, that in its turn connects with another, and so at last pours out by way of a river that empties into Hudson's Bay.

The course described is known to whites, and is a favorite trip for those who seek big game.

It was Colburn's idea that they should portage from Pahquatasing, or the lake beyond, to another river system, and so enter unexplored land, a procedure that Robertson advised him would be the simplest thing in the world.

Two things happened in the town founded by J. Foster when the expedition had been about twelve hours on its way.

One was the arrival of a telegram for Colburn; the other the arrival of a party of Indians with canoes. They came from down the river and went into camp till the summer should bring them employment from sportsmen or tourists.

The telegram was brought to the hotel by the station agent after supper.

"Of course you know he's gone," said Bagley.

"Yes, but he ought to have this message," replied the agent.

"Important, is it?"

"Well, I'm only saying he'd be better off if he had it. I've no right to tell what's in it."

"And I've no right to open it. Don't see as I can do anything about it."

"Might send it after him by one of the Indians. Plenty of 'em here now."

"Who's to pay the Indian? You?"

"That ain't my business."

"And it ain't mine. From the way that fellow Stilson kicked about charges

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I'm not thinking of running up any bill that I may have to meet myself. If it was for Mr. Mayberry, now, I'd take the chance of sending an Indian on with it, for he'd settle like a gentleman. But Colburn—that's the same as Stilson, so far as the bills go—I reckon it ain't my business."

CHAPTER III.

AN INDIAN CRISIS.

DURING the making of the canoe, the three men who comprised the expedition had had the precaution to practise handling the graceful craft.

Not one of them had had a paddle in his hands before, and the trick of using it had to be learned; for not one could go as a passenger.

Colburn took his lessons with Robertson in the stern, the head guide finding many occasions when he could leave the Indians to go on with the work without him; and under his instruction Colburn speedily became an adept—in his own estimation.

It looked simple enough to the other two who watched Colburn and the woodsman gliding over the river above the mill, and presently they ventured to embark in the other canoe and try it. When it turned bottom upwards in midstream they waded to the shore, yelling to the Indians, who ran down and caught the canoe just as it was about to go pounding over the dam.

Mayberry laughed till his sides ached at his blunder, accepting without a protest Stilson's crestfallen assurance that if Mayberry had sat still the thing would have gone along all right; and perhaps that was so, but the probability is that the upset might have been delayed if each had dug his paddle into the water with less violence.

They changed their clothes and tried again, consenting now to take some second-hand advice from Colburn, and accomplished a hundred yards and turn without catastrophe.

"I think I shall like this when I get the hang of it," Stilson said. "The thing slips along so easy that travel in it will be like play," and the Indians who heard said nothing.

Before the first half of that first day's journey was covered, Stilson was protesting that the current of the Pahquatasing ran swifter with every rod they advanced against it. He shifted his paddle frequently, and now and again took it from the water altogether and laid it across the gunwales.

Colburn, a man of powerful physique and no end of grit, was getting on with fewer shifts and no rests at all; with him in plain sight as an example, Stilson was spurred to steadier endeavor than might have been the case otherwise, and the novelty of the scene and the exhilaration of being at last on the real exploration kept his spirits up till the midday rest.

With Mayberry, more accustomed than Stilson to physical exercise, the first half of the day passed more easily. His arms ached with the unusual strain, and often he longed for the sweep of oars to which he was accustomed, but his Indian was considerate.

"Take-um easy," suggested Mukwa, shifting his pipe to the remotest corner of his mouth. "Bimeby you get used to it."

"And bimeby the river'll flow the other way, won't it?"

"Not this river," replied the Indian, with perfect gravity; "some other river, mebbe. Ask Don."

Mayberry did not ask Don, but smiled at the red man's answer and toiled away. He did, however, take advantage of the advice offered, and much of his paddling was a matter of form; by which he gained facility in handling the paddle, and was hardly conscious that he had been at work when a halt was made for refreshments.

Even with Stilson there was little sense of fatigue after he had been on shore a few minutes. His arms ceased to ache almost as soon as he ceased to use them, but he looked at the palms of his hands ruefully.

"I'm afraid I ought to use gloves," he said.

"Got blisters?" asked Mayberry.

"Not yet, but they're coming."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Colburn, "a man who can't stand a half day's paddling has no business in the woods."

Up to this Stilson had kept a good

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temper, actually finding enough to enjoy in the experience to compensate for the exertion; but Colburn's sneer upset him.

"I've got business in these woods," he retorted, "and I know how to look after it."

Colburn laughed insolently, and there the matter ended for the time, though the scowl on Stilson's brow showed that it rankled deep.

Mayberry indulged in silent regret that the expedition could not have been composed of men congenial to each other, and gave his attention to the Indians, who were opening up the grub pack under the oversight of Robertson.

The party's outfit had been put into three packs: One for provisions, another for articles of clothing and camp utensils, and the third for shelter tents. Each canoe had one pack as its freight, but not always the same pack.

As time went on it was sometimes Colburn's canoe that bore the provisions, and sometimes Mayberry's or Stilson's.

Dinner was not hurried and the men smoked long before making a new start, for according to Robertson the head of the lake was the proper place for the first night's halt, and that could be reached easily under five hours. Thus far his word was law in such matters, though he never failed to express himself very deferentially.

"I think you'll find it better not to try to go beyond the head of the lake to-day," he had said, and Colburn had assented without a question.

The afternoon waned without other incident than the passing of Stilson's canoe by Mayberry's. Stilson could not keep the pace, and Gezhik was not inclined evidently to put out any extra strength.

For that matter, Gezhik may have reasoned that there was no need of it, for he knew where the camp was to be pitched.

So it happened that the others were waiting for him when Stilson's canoe at last brought up alongside the bank at the foot of a stretch of swift water that hardly amounted to rapids, but that did justify a short portage to the lake just above.

The delay gave the others a chance to rest, if they needed it, and, like most men in similar circumstances, they had small consideration for the need of him who had caused the delay by his fatigue; which is to say that they promptly began to prepare for the portage when he arrived.

"What's up now?" Stilson demanded, as he saw Robertson lifting his canoe from the water, the pack that had been in it having already been removed.

"Your canoe will be up in a second," replied Colburn, with a heartiness that seemed to imply not only that he was not conscious of a day's exertion, but that this manner of thing was wholly familiar to him, "and the pack in it will be up, too, on your stalwart shoulders, my boy."

As he spoke, Colburn swung the pack that had been in his canoe to his back, while Robertson lifted the canoe and put it over his head like an immense hood. Mukwa was making ready to lift his canoe in the same way, and Mayberry had the corresponding pack ready to carry.

"What have we got Indians for, I'd like to know?" Stilson asked petulantly. "I thought we were hiring men to do the hard work."

"You could have had an extra man for yourself," responded Colburn, grinning contemptuously, "but if I'd suggested it you'd have drawn the string so tight the purse never would have opened again."

Mayberry tried to prevent an altercation.

"It's the custom when traveling this way," said he, "for one man to carry the pack and one the canoe. Robertson says this isn't a long portage. You can see for yourself; it's hardly more than a hundred yards."

"That's all right," returned Stilson, somewhat mollified, "but no custom or emergency will make me do what I know I'm physically unfitted for. You can sneer all you like, Colburn. I'm no ox, neither am I a jackass. If I happen to have weak lungs, it's no fault of mine, but it would be my fault decidedly if I permitted myself to overstrain."

"Weak lungs!" exclaimed Mayberry,

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in genuine sympathy and some alarm, for a man of that type was bound to be a serious handicap to the expedition.

"I wasn't aware of it before," said Stilson, "but I fear it now. I've got a sharp pain here," placing his hand low on his thorax, "just as it is when a fellow has a severe cold. I suppose I caught cold by paddling all the forenoon, and then sitting inactive so long. I tell you, I don't like the symptom."

Robertson spoke from the recesses of the canoe.

"It's the paddle," said he calmly. "You've no reason to fear, sir. That's the way it 'most always affects beginners. Ye've got no more cold than that pine tree, and ye'll be as strong in three or four days if ye keep yer heart up."

"Do you feel that way?" Stilson asked of Mayberry.

"Now that you speak of it," was the reply, "I do notice a soreness there."

He meant this to be encouraging, and doubtless it might have been so if it had not been that Colburn felt called upon the comment, and, as usual, he managed to say something that irritated the purseholder exceedingly.

"Pity we didn't bring along some old woman to nurse you," he said.

Stilson gave way to imprecations of great violence and considerable variety. The sunburn on his face was overspread with the pallor of rage, and he advanced threateningly, but Mayberry stepped in his way.

"Don't mind it," he suggested lightly. "It wasn't a nice thing to say, but it's hardly worth a fuss. We've got to pull together somehow, you know."

Meantime Robertson had stalked away under his canoe, and Mukwa, whose ears apparently were deaf, had followed. Colburn wheeled into line and marched off with his pack, leaving Stilson to fume it out by himself.

"I don't want to butt in where I've no business," said Mayberry, catching up with Colburn, "but don't you think it might be just as well to touch a little lighter on Stilson's sore spots? If he can't take a joke, what's the use in rubbing it in? Doesn't do any good, does it?"

"No," growled Colburn, "I don't suppose it does, but he makes me so darned tired with his everlasting kicking and whining! I'll let him alone, though, if I can."

Mayberry breathed more freely, for he had feared that his intercession might prove to be ill-advised. Colburn seemed to take the suggestion in good part, and there was hope, therefore, for at least one peaceful evening.

Meantime Gezhik had unloaded his canoe and lifted it from the water.

"You take-um paddle," said he; "I come back for pack."

"That's as it should be," responded Stilson shortly, and thus it was.

The Indian made two trips to the camping-place, while the white walked up and threw himself upon the ground without a thought apparently of preparations for the night.

Colburn looked at him, idle when the others were at least trying to be busy, and his lips parted to utter a characteristic sarcasm, but he remembered, and contented himself with curling them disdainfully; and as Stilson did not see that, no harm was done.

There was no outbreak during supper, nor afterwards, so far as the whites were concerned in their relations with each other.

Robertson chatted in a slow, but for him enthusiastic way, about the route to be pursued during the next few days. Colburn listened and asked questions with all the keen interest that should properly be manifested by a leader, and Mayberry drank in the woodsman's words with the eagerness of a boy.

He had had his little view of wild nature during his student days, but none to compare with what seemed now in store, none really that compared with the exhilarating experience of this first day. His eyes could not tire of the somber beauties of the forest through which they had glided for hours, and it could not tire now of the placid serenity of the lake that stretched before them to hills that had the first blue tinge of distance to soften their green masses.

"What's the matter with Mukwa?" asked Colburn, rather suddenly.

The Indians had sat down for their pipes at a little distance, and close by

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the lake shore where the canoes lay. Stilson was sound asleep.

It was really well along in the evening, but in that northern latitude daylight lingers to a late hour.

Colburn had noticed that Mukwa withdrew frequently out of sight, and that his demeanor when he returned was crafty and suggestive of trouble; that is, so it seemed to Colburn, who had the average white man's regard for the Indian generally.

At the moment when his companions turned in response to his question, Mukwa was on his knees beside Gezhik, haranguing him earnestly, though not loudly, and with a multitude of gestures. Gezhik smoked away tranquilly, hands clasped about his knees, apparently wholly unmoved by his fellow tribesman's eloquence.

Mayberry was conscious of just one slight thrill as many a scene in Cooper recurred to him, and then he smiled, for the days when travelers might be in danger from the so-called treachery of the red man were far distant.

"I'm thinking," said Robertson, with an indulgent smile, "that Mukwa has brought along a load of Bagley's whisky. It's his one weakness."

"It is, is it?" exclaimed Colburn wrathfully. "Why the devil didn't you mention it? What business has a guzzling redskin in a party like this?"

"He's as good a man as there is in the woods when he's sober," Robertson was responding in his slow, tolerant way, but he spoke to Mayberry only, for Colburn had jumped up and was striding to where the Indians sat.

Neither of them noticed his approach till he was in front of them.

"Mukwa," said he sternly, "what are you doing?"

"Huh?" replied the Indian, surprised and getting to his feet. "Excuse me, I was talking to my friend here, *nizhi*, understand? Do you know Ojibway? *Nizhi* means friend. I'll tell you all about it. I'm an ignorant man, but I know some things. You say *bojo nizhi* when you meet——"

While he was speaking, his whisky-laden breath filled Colburn's nostrils.

"You're drunk," Colburn interrupted.

The Indian looked a bit startled, drew himself back a pace, and answered gravely, "Yes, sir; you've hit the nail on the head. I am."

He looked his employer straight in the eyes, and proudly for an instant; then the undermining influence of firewater was manifested in an abrupt change of demeanor.

"Colburn," said he, taking a partly-emptied flask from his pocket, "have a drink!"

The white man, originally outraged by the fact that his red subordinate was drunk, was foolishly incensed because the Indian addressed him familiarly.

To say nothing of the unwisdom of paying serious heed to what any intoxicated man says, Colburn might have known if he had had more experience that the Ojibway never means any familiarity or disrespect by omitting the "Mister." Men like Mukwa learn readily to use it, and other terms of respect, like "sir," which is frequently on their lips when talking with whites; but in his incipient intoxication Mukwa merely reverted to the characteristic manner of his tribe.

Unmindful of any of these considerations, and others that prudence should have dictated, Colburn took the extended flask and threw it upon the ground so hard that it broke in a hundred pieces.

"Get to your shake-down," he ordered, pointing authoritatively.

The Indian stood stock still, looking at the white steadily.

"That was my bottle," said he, not in anger, but with gravity worthy of entire sobriety.

Colburn struck him.

"Get to your shake-down," he repeated.

Robertson came lumbering up rapidly. It was not a graceful gait, and it did not seem to be fast, but whether on portage or unencumbered, Robertson, when he was in a hurry, could "get there" with amazing swiftness.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, and there was earnest agitation in his tone, "I wouldn't do that."

He put his hand on Colburn's arm.

"Well, I would," retorted Colburn,

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shaking him off, "and that's the difference."

"Excuse——"

"I won't have a drunken redskin in my camp!"

"Mr. Colburn," said Robertson, "if you want to go on to-morrow, you'd better let Mukwa alone. I'll attend to him."

The warning was so seriously given that Colburn swallowed the hot words that were upon the verge of his lips, but he stood with both fists clenched, quivering with anger.

Gezhik, who had sat in stolid immobility through the altercation, began to get up. Robertson spoke to both Indians briefly in their own language, and then turned with the idea of leading Colburn away from the scene.

Mukwa had been dislodged a bit by the blow, but he had neither run nor retaliated. He stood much as he had when accused of drunkenness, head up, eyes fixed upon Colburn.

His lips were pressed together, and only the fierce glow in his eyes told of the sudden sobriety that had come upon him, and the deep wrath that had taken the place of intoxication.

As Robertson turned, Mukwa turned also. He walked slowly to one of the canoes and prepared to pick it up.

"I'm afraid there's more trouble coming," said Mayberry in a low tone.

He had followed Robertson and had been a distressed observer of the whole scene.

Robertson turned again.

"I'll manage this if I can," he said with evident anxiety, and he went to Mukwa, asking Gezhik to go with him.

The conversation was in Ojibway, and while it progressed Colburn reluctantly went back to the place where he had been sitting.

"What are you goint to do, Mukwa?" asked Robertson.

"I'm going home."

"But I need your canoe."

"It's mine."

"Yes, but I need it. You know me. You never have trouble with me. Are we not friends these many years?"

"Don," replied the Indian, pausing for the first time in his preparations, "since so many summers that I have forgotten to count them you have been my friend. I have many friends among the pale faces. I have my enemies, too, but I never think of them unless I have had the firewater. Then I fight.

"Usually it is I who strike first, but I strike as against one who is my enemy. I do not despise him. If he is stronger, he beats me, and I go home to let the bruises heal and get new strength. Then the firewater leaves me and I never mind. That man did not strike me as he would strike an enemy. It was with contempt for the red man. I could throw him into the lake, but he is your friend, and I will not. He has made me ashamed, and I am going home."

Then followed a long and patient argument. The Indian was still hazy with the fumes of alcohol, for after the shock of the blow, which had sobered him momentarily, they returned to confuse him, but his logic held good, and no contrary reason affected him in the least.

Robertson pleaded that the white man was hasty and would not be offensive again, to no avail. Gezhik stood by, and from time to time put in a softly-voiced suggestion that the matter was not worth the sacrifice of a summer's job. It was all to no avail.

At last Robertson returned to his first ground, urging his own need.

"It's my own job I'm thinking of, Mukwa," said he. "I can't keep it without all the canoes, and if I lose you I don't know where we'll get another man of any kind. You know as well as I do that I can't get such a good guide as you in all the wilderness."

Flattery and the personal appeal did their appointed work, and at the end of a half hour of palaver, Mukwa put the canoe as it had been, shook hands with Robertson, and promised to stay.

Robertson took Gezhik aside on the pretense of giving him some instructions about the camp.

"Has he got any more liquor?" he asked.

Gezhik was quite sure that one flask was all he had had money to pay for.

"Bagley might have trusted him," Robertson suggested, and Gezhik, who

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was a total abstainer, not an altogether unknown being among the Ojibways, promised to keep an eye out and remove the dangerous stuff if he found any.

Satisfied that the emergency was passed safely, Robertson returned to the fire in front of the tents used by the whites.

"Well," said Colburn glumly, "has the noble red man taken a tumble to himself?"

Some seconds passed before Robertson answered. He sat down slowly, and slowly filled his pipe. Then said he:

"He'll stay with us. It would have been all right if he'd been left alone. He'd have had his bit of a spree this night and to-morrow he'd have felt so sorry that you couldn't ask for a better man. Mukwa's all right when he's sober. None better in all the woods."

"He'd better keep sober, then," was Colburn's reply.

Robertson puffed in silence for a time, so long that Colburn had actually made a remark on another subject.

"It would be bad for us," he said at length, "to lose any man, Mukwa, or any other."

"But," Colburn insisted, "we *could* get along with one gone."

"Yes, we *could*, but I wouldn't guarantee how far."

"Well, I'll take the responsibility. I won't be annoyed by a drunken redskin, I don't care how important he is."

Another long silence followed. Mayberry would have liked to start the conversation in its former channel, but he felt apprehensive.

It was tolerably plain that the end of this one was not yet. And so it seemed when presently Robertson took his pipe from his mouth and said gravely. "Mr. Colburn, if you'll excuse me, sir, I think it would be a little better if you would leave the handling of the Indians to me. I know them, and they know me. There's ways to get along with them, and ways not to——"

"I'll see that you have all the work and responsibility that you ought to have," Colburn interrupted, "but while this party is under my charge I'll run it."

The woodsman looked at him, took several puffs and eventually knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Very well, sir," said he, and turned in with no further comment.

CHAPTER IV.

COLBURN SUSPECTS TREACHERY.

MAYBERRY lay down that night with many misgivings as to the success of the expedition. It even seemed to him that its very continuance was threatened by Colburn's injudicious (to put it mildly) conduct towards all connected with it.

"Not only has he incurred the hostility of one, and perhaps both the Indians," he mused, "but he has given deep offense to Robertson. How unnecessary! As if he couldn't assert his leadership without insult. I should suppose it would be the part of a good leader to encourage his men to do their utmost and not despise their suggestions. We'd be in a pretty mess if Robertson should take it into his head to go home."

There was a good deal less danger of that calamity than Mayberry fancied.

He could not realize how deeply Robertson's heart was in this journey, now that he had overcome his resolution to stay at home; but more than that, there was to reckon with and rely on in his character not only the dogged pertinacity of the woodsman, but the habit of obedience that had come with long years in the Hudson Bay service.

Nowhere, not even in the army of a despot, can there be found men more readily subservient to authority than those who are or have been in the employ of the famous company.

They are deferential to a degree of politeness that is not surpassed by the traditional Frenchman, though their manner may be uncouth. And faithfulness follows these acquired qualities as surely as sunset follows morning.

No, there was small danger as yet that Robertson would leave the expedition in the lurch.

But it was not unreasonable in Mayberry to fear disaster of this and other kinds, in view of the leader's unrea-

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sonable outbursts of tyrannical temper and his bludgeon-like sarcasm. A man less after his own pattern could not be imagined, and it was without conceit that he held Colburn up in his own mind to no small measure of condemnation.

There were traits of character revealed since the trio left the city that he could tolerate only in silent disgust.

With wakeful musings of this sort it was natural that his thoughts should turn to Rose Osborne, and a great tenderness swept over him. Was it possible that she had been so deceived in Colburn as to give [redacted] heart?

It was impossible [redacted] so, equally impossible not [redacted]; for there was Colburn's [redacted] satisfaction after the reading of the letter that came from her.

No ingenious flattery of hope could make Mayberry really doubt that she had given him the encouragement he sought. It was a depressing, despairing conviction that forced itself upon him, try as he would to shut his eyes to it and forget it.

There was no forgetting it, no forgetting Rose Osborne; and in saying that to himself, Mayberry fell sound asleep, such being the penalty that sentiment pays to perfect health.

The camp was astir at an early hour on the following morning.

Robertson arose first and roused the Indians. Mukwa had not had enough liquor to give him more than a stimulating fit of remorse, and the preparation of breakfast progressed rapidly. Mayberry was awakened by the noise they made.

He looked from the tent with the honest joy of youth in the clear sunlight, the placid lake, the forest-clad hills beyond. The lake tempted him and he yielded.

Slipping out quietly, so as not to attract the attention of the guides, he ran to a spot he had noticed the evening before where a rock dropped straight down into ten feet of water. There he cast off his garment and plunged in.

Ah, the exhilaration of that cool shock! Never had Mayberry been in water so cold, save once when a boy he went through the ice, and then he was too frightened to observe the temperature.

Now he tingled with the cold even while he was splashing vigorously with only his head above the surface. Discretion told him that a plunge must be all, if he would benefit and not suffer from it, and he struck out for the rock from which he had jumped.

Then he saw Robertson running toward it with a [redacted] in his hand, followed more slowly and yet with some suggestion of speed by the tranquil Gezhik. The woodsman's face was furrowed by anxiety.

"Are ye thinking of suicide, sir?" he asked, his arrows remaining, but the expression changing into one of bewilderment as he saw Mayberry swimming toward the shore.

"Suicide!" echoed Mayberry, in bewilderment of his own, and then a rapid dip, dip attracted his attention in another direction.

Turning, he saw Mukwa in one of the canoes paddling toward him with all the speed and power his dark frame could put forth.

"What the mischief is the matter?" asked Mayberry, hardly able to believe that his question was justified; "did you men think I was trying to drown myself?"

"What should you jump into the water for?" retorted Robertson.

Mayberry's reply was a hearty laugh as he pulled himself out upon the rock.

"Gezhik," said he, "run to the tent and get my clothes, will you, please?"

Gezhik silently complied—that is, he got the clothes, but he did not run.

"I made certain ye'd drown, sir," said Robertson, "and we was coming to help. Mukwa jumped into the canoe at the first splash, and I hoped to reach ye with a paddle."

Mayberry laughed again as he thrashed himself violently with his arms and turned his back to the sun.

"Isn't the water fearfully cold, sir?" asked the woodsman.

"Very; but you didn't think it was attempted suicide, did you? I should hate to think you believed me that sort of a man."

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"Well, no sir, not exactly. I thought you didn't realize how cold these northern lakes are, and that you'd be paralyzed with it. I've heard of such things."

"It isn't too cold for a quick bath. Don't you ever try it?"

"Me, sir?" and Robertson smiled pityingly at the mere suggestion. "Not I, sir. I can't swim."

"Great Scott! what do you do when your canoe upsets?"

"It don't upset, sir."

"Oh! but suppose an accident happened? Suppose your bow paddle was a fool and tipped it over. What would you do then?"

"Ask Mukwa, sir."

The Indian who had come to the rescue in a canoe was holding the craft near the shore, looking gravely at the venturesome young white man.

"Well, Mukwa," said Mayberry, "suppose you tipped over in your canoe in the middle of the lake; what would you do?"

"Drown," he answered, and began to paddle back.

Mayberry was so struck with this that he had no comment to make.

"Can Gezhik swim?" he asked.

"I don't think it," replied Robertson. "You'll find some of the Indians along Huron who are like ducks in the water, but along Superior and in these inland lakes the water is too cold for them to learn. Leastways, I suppose that's the reason. It's always kept me out of it."

He went back to his work and Mayberry finished dressing. When he returned to his tent Stilson was sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Wow!" he yawned, "I feel as stiff as a log. Honest, Mayberry, I'm afraid I wasn't cut out for this sort of thing."

"Nonsense! You'll limber up in no time. I can tell you just how if you can swim."

"Of course I can."

"Take a plunge, then. I've just come out, and I feel like a good deal better man than I know I am."

"So? I mean, have you been in?"

"Yes, indeed. Look at my hair. Jump in right there," and he pointed to the rock.

Stilson thought well of it and walked gingerly down to the shore, holding his blanket about him. Arrived at the edge, he looked down at the water doubtfully, and then thrust one foot in an inch or two.

"Br-r-r-r!" he shivered, drawing it out hastily. "Not for me! I'm no fool," and he went back.

Colburn, fully dressed, was standing in the doorway of his tent. His sneer of contempt was deep as he saw Stilson back out, and impulsively he began to unbutton his jacket.

Mayberry, observing at a little distance, was disappointed, for it was only too clear that he had it in mind to show off at Stilson's expense.

"Too bad," thought Mayberry. "If I could only have got Stilson into the water it would have brightened him up for at least half a day. Now he'll get a sarcastic browbeating from Colburn, the brute, that will sour him for hours!"

Antipathy to Colburn surged through his blood at that moment with a malignant force little short of hatred. But for once the leader of the expedition either mastered his impulse or decided that weightier matters demanded his attention, for he buttoned his jacket again, and strode across the camp to the canoes which Robertson was pitching for the days trip.

The Indians were at the moment taking down and packing up the tents.

"Don," said Colburn, "what do you think Mukwa was talking to Gezhik about last night?"

"When he was drunk, sir?"

"Certainly. I didn't know that he talked to him at any other time. Did he?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Well, what was it about?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir. I wasn't listening."

"Didn't you catch any word that might be a clue?"

"No, sir. It was probably nothing at all."

"I don't believe it. I don't like the looks of that Mukwa. He's got a sour, suspicious face. I've never heard him laugh. Gezhik, on the other hand,

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though he doesn't say much, is grinning half the time."

"Well, that's their different ways, sir."

"Ha! I don't like Mukwa's way. I admit he's the better workman, so far as a redskin can be called a workman, but if he should poison Gezhik's shadow of a mind, it wouldn't be well for us. I've no faith in these redskins. They're treacherous devils."

Robertson's dark face was darker than usual with resentment that his habitual deference to authority led him to repress.

Quite in his characteristic way he mulled the thing over to himself before he ventured to speak, and when he did speak it was soberly and without apparent rancor.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, "but that's a mistake that many a white man makes. These Indians are not treacherous——"

"Oh, you've got some exceptions, eh?" and the interruption was accompanied by a lofty sneer.

"They're straight men," Robertson went on, unheeding either sneer or interruption. "I guarantee them. If you're not satisfied, or if you have any fear of treachery, now's the time to make a change. With the current to help it's a short day's paddle back to Pahquatasing, where you can wait for other Indians to come, and take your choice."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of anything so bad as that. We're four white men, and though one is no good, we should be able to keep the redskins under discipline. I was only thinking that you may be too easy with them. That's about all, though I should feel better if I knew what sort of an argument that drunken devil was putting up with Gezhik."

The muscles around the woodsman's lips were working suggestively, but Colburn failed to note the symptom.

"Mukwa was drunk," said Robertson, the usual pause having intervened, "and I don't excuse that, but in his wildest drunk he never does anything worse than maul his best friend. I've had a tussel or two with him myself. Once he lit into me before I was looking for it and closed my right eye. That got my mad up, I'll admit, and I banged him so hard that he didn't work for four days afterwards."

"Good!" exclaimed Colburn, his eyes blazing.

"I was sorry for it as soon as I'd done it," continued Robertson, "but Mukwa knew he'd deserved it, and we've been good friends ever since. He'll take anything from me because he knows I'll only give him what's right.

"As to what he was saying last night I could give a good guess, as the men from the States say. Mukwa is a crank on one subject. You can start him on it when he's sober, and he'll talk by the hour. With the first dose of firewater off he goes of himself, and there's no stopping him till he gets fighting drunk."

"Give us the guess, then. What's his favorite doctrine?"

Colburn expected to hear an exposition of the redman's view of Socialism, or some other ism equally pernicious from the point of view of the prospective capitalist.

"Language," said Robertson simply.

"Language? What the devil——"

"Mukwa was born and passed his boyhood near Sault Sainte Marie, which is the ancestral home of the Ojibways, or Chippewas, as you men from the States call them. The Indians thereabout think mighty well of themselves on that account, and hold that only there is their language spoken correctly. I'm thinking that they're about right, sir, but that doesn't matter.

"I've noticed that Mukwa, who has traveled all over Canada, is very fond of correcting the pronunciation of the Indians he meets. He never has trouble with them when he's sober, for he doesn't offend them, though maybe they think he takes a good deal upon himself. Now, Gezhik never has lived at the lake shore, and I presume Mukwa——"

Here Robertson desisted to call to Gezhik, who was passing. The Indian approached, his face smiling as was his habit.

"What was Mukwa talking about last night?" asked Robertson.

"He tell me I no talk Ojibway good,"

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Gezhik replied, smiling more broadly than before.

Robertson looked gravely up at Colburn, but he saw only the leader's back. Colburn was stalking to the fire, where breakfast awaited him. He did not refer to his suspicions again, and Robertson was discreet enough not to ask him if he was satisfied.

CHAPTER V.

AN ACCIDENT.

THE progress of the expedition for the second and third days may be passed without detailed description. No episode of significance occurred.

They paddled from end to end of Pahquatasing, through the connecting channel to the lake beyond, and half its length to a noon landing on the western bank. Thence there was a portage over a low ridge to a river that flowed toward the north. Camp for the second night was on the bank of this river.

Next day they journeyed down stream with but the shortest halt for dinner and went into camp only when darkness began to fall,

It was a long day's work, and the men were too tired to express any irritation that may have been upon them. Till now their eyes had rested on nothing that white men had not seen before them, but on the morrow, after a long portage, they would enter a district where they could claim to be the first comers.

This thought aided to still such discontent as existed on account of Colburn's arbitrary and ill-advised methods of leadership.

It would be vain to set down here the several petty incidents that served little other purpose than to keep Mayberry on edge, Stilson in a state of chronic grumbling, and that closed Robertson's lips to all conversation save that which the business of the moment demanded.

As yet Mayberry had done no prospecting of any serious character, except that all his observations of the country they passed were serious. Now and again, as the canoes glided close to a ledge, his keen eyes discerned the scar made by some previous prospector; and though there was much in the rock formation to interest him as a geologist, he was content to leave the results of investigation as they had been found by his predecessors. His heart longed for the unknown wilderness where he could feel the thrill of original search.

It was Mukwa who chose the site for the camp that third evening. He had traversed the country beyond, and Robertson yielded to his judgment without a question. Not even Colburn made any objection, though he asked the question "Why?" unceasingly.

This was a proper enough inquiry, coming from the leader, as were many others that he asked about the route, the kind of country to be expected, its water courses, and so forth. To all of these the Indian made no reply; he had not spoken a word to Colburn since the quarrel at the first camp.

Robertson hovered near whenever Colburn sought information from the red-skinned guides, and in his deliberate, inoffensive manner made the answers, after first conversing with Mukwa in Ojibway.

A persistent rain was falling when the party landed. The travelers were already soaked with it, and the whites went to work in self-defense, occupying themselves with setting up the shelters.

Mukwa attacked a fallen tree with an ax, Gezhik wandered inland after pine knots, and Robertson stripped bark from a birch that grew near. The bark was dripping with water when he laid some strips underneath Gezhik's knots and Mukwa's wood, but when he touched a match to it, a crackling flame instantly arose.

It seemed as if the rain drops themselves were on fire, so readily did the bark burn.

Mayberry watched this procedure with eager interest, and Robertson, observing this, said, "Many's the time I've packed a handful of birch bark across the snows where birch might not be found. It might lie in the bottom of the lake for a month, but it would kindle a fire as soon as it was brought to the surface."

The knots caught, and then the wood, and in short order there was a fire that

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defied the weather and banished the discomfort of wet clothes.

Stilson himself was moved to cheerful remarks, and fortunately Colburn was so absorbed in thoughts of his own that he made none of his biting retorts. So the brief waking period of the evening passed without friction.

In the morning an early start was made over the long portage, in the hope of arriving at a spot Mukwa had described to Robertson as desirable for the next camp.

The route involved a long tramp through the woods and over the shoulder of a mountain to a river, down which they could float to a lake; across this to its outlet, where the canoes would shoot a series of rapids to the camp site some miles below.

There was no trail. The instinct, to say nothing of the knowledge, of the Indian was depended on for the finding of the way.

Stilson had wholly overcome his objection to carrying one of the packs. Whether willingly or not, he had adapted himself to the necessities of the situation, and borne his share of the undertaking without protest.

But Colburn thought fit to remind him of his obligations before the day's march began.

"No double duty for your Indian today, Stilson," said he. "We haven't time to allow a man to cover this route twice. You'll have to tote your own pack."

"I've no idea of doing anything else," Stilson replied.

"See that you keep the pace, then."

Of course it was the manner rather than the words that stirred the purse-bearer's wrath. He cursed his leader fervently, and Colburn's cheeks flushed.

"There's a limit to the bullying I'll stand," was the non-profane substance of Stilson's protest, "and you've just about reached it, Mr. John Colburn."

"I guess you'll stand what comes just as the rest of us do," retorted Colburn with an oath of his own. "If it's going to take a licking to bring you into line I'll not hesitate to give it, and it might better be now than later."

Mukwa stood beside his canoe, pipe in his mouth, looking and listening with unmoved countenance; but his eyes were mainly upon Colburn. Gezhik folded his arms, and his habitual smile disappeared. Robertson pretended not to observe the dispute.

"Oh, come along," said Mayberry, shouldering his pack. "This isn't progress. Let's get a move on."

"You give your advice when it's asked for," snapped Colburn.

Mayberry set down his pack. There was a limit for him, too, it seemed, and he shut his jaws hard to repress any senseless retort that might spring from his anger; but his impulse was not so much to quarrel on his own account as to defend Stilson if necessary.

The purse-bearer would have been but a fragile twig in the hands of the leader, and Mayberry perhaps could have done no more than even up the forces, but that he would have done.

Stilson was far from showing the coward. He stood his ground with clenched fists, looking quite as much at Mayberry as at the leader.

For a moment there was a pause. Mayberry's intercession had created a diversion in Colburn's mind, to speak in military terms, and it may be that it had actually prevented hostilities of the fiercer sort; but Mayberry found that he could not suppress his own resentment wholly.

"You must not speak to me like that, Mr. Colburn," he said, bending once again to his pack.

"Must not!" cried Colburn, in a fury. "*Must* not? What the devil would you——" He choked and looked around at the group.

Seeing Mukwa coldly regarding him, he finished his question by directing it, or another, at the Indian. "What are you doing, you lazy red beggar? Stand there and rubber at me as if I was a free show, would you? It's your business to march. Start!"

Mukwa turned his head toward Robertson, who looked up with an expression of long-tried patience. The Indian asked a question in Ojibway, to which the woodsman answered "Geget," (yes) wearily, whereupon Mukwa promptly lifted the canoe.

With no more words the march began.

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Mukwa strode ahead, followed closely by Mayberry. Then came Robertson under a canoe, with Colburn behind. Stilson was next, his eyes fixed all but immovably on Colburn's back, and Gezhik with the third canoe brought up the rear.

It was a long, hard journey. Many times they halted to rest, and at one such halt they had dinner. It was after midday when they began to climb a steep slope that not even the Indian guide knew how to circumvent in any easier way.

"Will we ever get to that river?" Colburn demanded. "It certainly won't be found running up hill."

"We'll come to it on the other side of this," Robertson answered from beneath his birchen hood.

"It wouldn't surprise me at all," grumbled Colburn, "if it proved that the sneaking redskin was fooling us."

"He knows the country, sir. Would he be doing all this work for nothing?"

"No. He has his object."

"What is that, sir?"

"Revenge."

"Don't think it, Mr. Colburn. You don't know Mukwa as I do. He is now under my orders and he is obeying."

The leader's eyes snapped resentfully at this quiet assertion of a certain authority, but he refrained from rasping the woodsman by insult directed at him.

"He'd better obey," he said, and let the matter drop.

When they arrived at the summit of the ridge Colburn strained his eyes to distinguish the water-course at the bottom. He saw nothing but the interminable forest that confined the view to a small radius.

Even Mukwa and his canoe were disappearing in the foliage far down the slope, for having arrived first at the summit, he and Mayberry had gained on the followers by having a minute or two of easier march.

"Ask the beggar," said Colburn, "how far it is to the river."

Robertson called in Ojibway, and when the answer came back to them he translated. "He says he'll holler when he sees it."

"That doesn't answer the question," exclaimed Colburn.

"Aye, it doesn't, but it's all ye're likely to get from the Indian."

Colburn was silent, but that was no indication that he was satisfied.

Shortly after this the way took them beside what appeared to be a dried-up rivulet, or a small landslide of some past springtime, for at their right was an irregular bare line covered with loose stones.

A shout came from below.

"Does he see it?" asked Colburn eagerly.

"I think so," replied Robertson, stepping along as rapidly as was safe to himself and the precious burden he carried.

Colburn again strained his eyes, but could see no gleam of water. In his eagerness he attempted to pass his guide, turning into the dry watercourse to do so.

The way was narrow at best, and care for the fragile canoe should have made him restrain his curiosity, but with that headlong, inconsiderate way that his companions had come to see was characteristic of all he undertook, he edged past with his pack.

A stone in the watercourse rolled under his foot, and he staggered. The pack bumped against the canoe just forward of where Robertson had his hold. It swayed aside and the forward end collided with a tree.

"Look out!" gasped Robertson, keenly alive to the danger.

He staggered on his own account, and tried to bring himself to an abrupt halt. Colburn also perceiving the danger, attempted to slip his pack from his shoulders and save the canoe.

The catastrophe came almost simultaneously with Robertson's warning cry.

Colburn slipped again, the pack lurched again against the canoe, Robertson was pushed wholly from his footing on the steep hillside, and both men and their burdens went down together.

Robertson threw the canoe from him to avoid crushing in its frail side. He lay with one arm under him glaring up at Colburn, who scrambled hastily to his feet.

"Ye dommed fool!" groaned the woodsman.

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Colburn was so thoroughly startled by the possibilities of irremediable disaster involved in the accident that he made no show of temper; probably he felt none.

"I hope nothin's broken," he stammered.

The woodsman turned his head to look the canoe over.

"There's nothing there," he muttered between gritted teeth, "that Mukwa can't pitch in an hour. I'm not so sure about my arm."

The leader's heart stood still. He saw now the position in which Robertson lay, and it dawned upon him that the woodsman had made no effort to get up.

"Mayberry," shouted Colburn, "come back here!"

Stilson and Gezhik were appearing over the summit of the ridge. They arrived at the same time with Mayberry, who took in the situation at a single shocked glance. He stooped over Robertson.

"Can't you stir?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Robertson, "I think so. My head was whirling at first. I think I shall be all right by the time the canoe is patched up."

With the help of Colburn and Mayberry he got to his feet, his strong features twisting with a spasm of pain when he tried to step.

"There's something wrong with my leg, too," said he, "but it will pass soon. Nothing broken, I think."

Mayberry knelt to make an examination.

"I'm no surgeon," he said presently, "but I should say that you've got nothing worse than a sprained ankle."

"That'll soon mend."

"How about your arm? Can you move it?"

Robertson tried. His face turned sallow, but the arm moved.

"Don't try again," said Mayberry. "I've got some stuff in one of the packs that is said to be good for bruises and sprains. You'd best lie down as comfortably as you can until I can open the pack——"

Robertson interrupted with a shake of his head.

"No, sir, thankee," said he, in his usual slow way. "We mustn't halt here. It's no place for a camp, sir. You can help me down to the river, perhaps. It's just below there, I suppose."

"Yes; Mukwa must be there by this time."

At that moment Mukwa came toiling up the slope to see for himself what had caused the delay. He expressed his surprise and concern by taking his pipe from his mouth and putting it in a pocket.

"Gentlemen," said Robertson, with a faint smile, "let these boys do the work. They know how."

He spoke to the Indians in their own tongue. Gezhik, who had already set down his canoe, came to one side of the injured man and Mukwa to the other. They lifted him in their arms and bore him down the hill to the river bank, laying him with his back to a giant pine.

Without waiting for orders, they ascended the hill again and brought down the canoes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LEADER ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY.

During the first few minutes after the alarming calamity, Colburn was as quiet as a lamb and apparently as meek.

He carried his own pack to the river bank, set it down, and watched the others caring for Robertson, offering no suggestions, giving no commands, content to let the men do in their own way what the emergency called for.

While the Indians were bringing down the other canoes, Stilson opened a pack and searched it until he found the remedy Mayberry had spoken of, and which he applied to Robertson's bare arm and ankle. This took but little time, and the Indians were still on the slope with the canoes when Stilson found himself idle, for there was nothing he could do to assist Mayberry.

Then it appeared to Colburn time to reassert his leadership. It was as if he feared that presently his subordinates would discover that they had been getting on quite well without his direction, and that they would be lacking in deference thereafter.

As Stilson was the only one unoccupied it was to him that the leader gave his tyrannical attention.

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"Come on, Stilson," said he, "we mustn't lose time. That lazy beggar of an Indian didn't launch this canoe. Help me put it in the water."

"Why," said Stilson, surprised, "it won't be possible to go on to-day, will it?"

"That remains to be seen," replied Colburn shortly. "We'll save time by getting the canoe in and having it ready."

He stooped at one side with his hands on the gunwale, and Stilson slowly went around to the other.

Stilson moved and looked as if he were dazed by the calamity that had befallen the expedition. He was too cast down by it to utter, or even to feel, resentment for Colburn's dictatorial manner. They lifted the canoe and moved toward the water a few yards distant.

"Mr. Colburn," called Robertson, and his voice was suggestively husky, "excuse me, sir, but likely Mukwa will want to overhaul that canoe before she goes in after such a long portage."

Promptly at the suggestion, Stilson began to lower his side.

"Go ahead with it!" exclaimed Colburn under his breath, but sharply. "If the redskin wants to overhaul it he can have the trouble of taking it out of the water."

If it occurred to him that a canoe needs to be out of the water for a long time before the pitch is applied to its seams or cracks, he dismissed that consideration in favor of one that appealed to him as more important—the assertion of his own authority.

Stilson had not as yet knowledge enough of travel in the wilds to perceive the reason behind Robertson's protest, but he did feel that the woodsman's suggestion should be adopted. So for a moment he stopped, hesitating.

It was by no means rebellion against his leader. He took it as a matter of course that Robertson's voice should be heeded, and he could not understand why Colburn insisted on the procedure that had been begun.

But Stilson could not forthwith drop his side of the canoe. He did know enough to avoid that, for if he had done so the fragile bark in all probability would have cracked, and then there might be hours of delay while Mukwa worked with his pitch pot.

In the brief pause Robertson spoke again.

"Mukwa's just back in the bush there, Mr. Colburn. He can tell at a glance if anything's to be done to it."

"Put it in, I tell you!" whispered Colburn angrily. "I won't be faced down like that in the presence of the treacherous reds. Can't you see that with Robertson laid up I've got to exert my authority undisputed? I'll give Robertson himself a hint of that before long."

The argument had some force with Stilson, although he was far from sharing the leader's distrust of the Indians. On the contrary he had found Gezhik not a bad sort of fellow, and he had been influenced by some things that Mayberry had said about the natives in the course of conversations incidental to the journey.

But Stilson was in no mood to resist, and if he had been the inevitable result would have been a row, and the canoe went in.

They made the ends fast to saplings, and Colburn energetically put the provision pack aboard.

"Doesn't leak a drop, you see," said he.

"How did it happen?" Stilson asked, jerking his head toward the tree where Robertson lay.

"Oh," replied Colburn, "it was just one of those accidents that may happen any time in the woods. The most experienced man will lose his footing at times. I don't think any the less of Don for it. He did his best to save the canoe. We'll see now if it was damaged."

The Indians had been in view since Robertson last spoke, Mukwa ahead with the doubtful canoe over him. He set the canoe down with the utmost care and took his pipe from his pocket.

"Is she badly damaged?" asked Colburn.

For answer, the Indian lit a match and applied it to his pipe.

Robertson said something in Ojibway, whereupon Mukwa, without deigning so much as a glance at Colburn, turned the canoe bottom up and proceeded to make a minute examination. Gezhik,

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having set down his canoe, came and joined him.

Colburn ground his teeth in his rage, but beyond this manifestation, which Stilson noticed curiously, he kept his wrath to himself.

Presently Mukwa put his finger on a spot and muttered. It was Ojibway, and Colburn fretted again in his ignorance. Gezhik responded with a grunt.

"Is she cracked there, or weak?" asked Colburn.

Mukwa went on stolidly pressing the bark with his finger tips, but Gezhik looked up with his simple smile and answered, "Broke; got to get-um pitch."

"I didn't speak to you!" snapped the leader.

Gezhik had turned away, but at this he faced about slowly. His smile was in evidence as before.

"Yes, sir," said he tranquilly.

The leader was utterly nonplussed. What to make of such a response under the circumstances was utterly beyond him, as it would be beyond any man who had had no contact with the Ojibways.

Colburn could not classify it as contempt or misunderstanding, but it certainly was not the servile respect he craved, and that was enough to stimulate his wrath. His fist clenched spasmodically, and if Gezhik had been on his side of the canoe there undoubtedly would have been a blow.

"Get the pitch ready, then," bellowed Colburn, red in the face.

For a moment it seemed as if neither Indian had heard him. Mukwa kept prodding the bark sides of the canoe, Gezhik stood looking steadily at the leader, his smile changing by imperceptible degrees to a graver expression.

Robertson watched helplessly, and Mayberry glanced over his shoulder at the tableau with a sickening heart. It was not wholly the fortune of the expedition that worried him at the moment.

"And this is the man Rose Osborne has chosen!" was his despairing, resentful reflection.

The tableau endured but a moment, long enough to set Colburn quivering in the effort he made to control his anger.

Then Gezhik turned again, went slowly to a tree against which he had laid the third canoe, and sat down on the ground, clasping his knees with his hands and gazing a sullen defiance at the leader.

Mukwa went on prodding. Some grains of sense seemed to be mingled with Colburn's makeup, for he did not stride across the ground and assault the mild-mannered Indian who so manifestly disregarded him. To that extent he held himself in check.

Stilson strolled up to the tree where Robertson lay, and remarked profanely that Colburn was several kinds of a fool.

Robertson's eyes were almost closed, but he kept their gaze on the leader, and his lips trembled.

The woodsman's brain was not a quick one. The strain in his blood, or long habits of the wilderness, or both, ill-fitted him to cope with this manner of emergency.

Put him in a canoe on the rapids, with life dependent upon swift and certain strokes of the paddle; or let him face a startled moose, or a maddened grizzly, and none could be quicker than he to do the right thing promptly and in the right way. In this situation he found it easier to address himself first to one of his own order of intelligence.

"Gezhik," he called, "the pitch pot is in the pack here. Come and get it and set a fire."

The words were in Ojibway, but their purport was plain to all in the prompt, though characteristically slow demeanor of the Indian. He arose, shambled across the intervening space, and went to work as directed.

Then Colburn strode up to the giant pine.

"Don," said he, "it's all right for you to talk to those lazy beggars in a gibberish I can't understand, especially if it's the only way to get them to work; but I'm the head of this expedition, I believe, and I want you to tell the blame fools that what I say goes. When I give an order, they're to obey it and not wait for you to speak, understand? And when I ask a question, I want it answered. Tell them that, too."

"Mr. Colburn," responded the woodsman with extraordinary coolness, "you may go straight to hell."

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Colburn started as if he had been stung.

"You defy me?" he hissed inquiringly. "Why, you ignorant clodhopper, I hired you. You're to do my work. You take a coward's advantage of an occasion when you know I can't punch you as you deserve. You never dared talk that way when you were up and able to defend yourself."

The leader's back was turned to the Indians; he did not see, therefore, that for the first time since the altercation began they were both standing still and regarding him, their countenances utterly expressionless.

Mukwa's pipe stuck as usual from his mouth, and the shadow of his smile hovered about Gezhik's lips. The latter had the pitch pot in his hand. Mukwa stood with folded arms. Both were waiting to see if Colburn would venture to assault their ancient friend, and they waited thus to the end.

"I chose to speak now," said Robertson, "because now is the time when you ask me to do what I won't do. You never asked it before. As for punching me, you'll have all the chance you want before we can get back to Pahquatasing. When this gentleman has got my arm fixed, I'll stand up and break your back for you with one hand if you like."

Till this, Mayberry had kept his head bent over his task, which in reality was finished. Now he raised his head, still kneeling and sitting back on his heels.

Indignation, apprehension for the success of the expedition which meant so much to him, humiliation at being concerned in such a senseless wrangle—all these emotions were surging in conflict within him. He tried to speak with the gravity befitting a man of science.

"Robertson," he said, "don't talk of going back to Pahquatasing. All this trouble is little short of insanity. We must endure it. The expedition needs you——"

Colburn tapped him none too gently on the shoulder.

"Professor," he sneered, "suppose you let *me* talk this out. Stick to your ologies and leave direction to a grown man."

There was in that first remark a subtle sting that added its trifling irritation to the heat of the moment.

Early in their acquaintance Mayberry had politely requested Colburn not to address his a "professor." It was a title that Mayberry, as a college man, respected highly, and one to which as yet he had no academic right, and it jarred upon his perhaps too sensitive nature to be addressed by it—just as no right thinking captain likes to be called "Colonel."

But it was not this deliberate insult—for till this occasion Colburn had respected the request—that caused Mayberry's blood to boil. It was the intolerable tone and manner which had exasperated him earlier in the day.

He stood up quickly, but before he could make a retort, Stilson had cut in.

"Pity," he said, "we didn't bring a strait-jacket along."

So the row was general.

Stilson's interjection served a double purpose: it gave Mayberry a momentary reaction to the end that he kept his dignity; and it turned the current of Colburn's wrath in a new direction, for his temper, like that of all bullies, took the line of least resistance.

"You shut up!" he snapped, and his hand was raised to strike.

Stilson stepped back hastily.

"Mr. Colburn," said Robertson sharply, and the leader turned to him, "it is not my mind to desert your expedition. You're my boss, and if you want me along you can have me. I'm not one to go back on an undertaking; but I'm done with hearing my friends called lazy beggars and other bad names. Sick or well, I'll see that your work is done for you as it should be. You can have it in your own way if that's your mind, but you'll have to talk to the Indians through me.

"You can fret as much as you like; butt your head against this pine if you want to. There's no law in the bush to prevent you, and there's no law to make me do a fool thing. If you don't like what I'm telling you, you can call it up when I'm well, or any other time. I stand by it from now till we see Pahquatasing again."

Colburn wheeled suddenly about and saw the Indians standing like statues a

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few paces distant. Some impression of ominous possibilities must have been forced in upon him, for he turned to Robertson again, and addressed him in a tone that showed mighty effort at control.

"How long," he asked, "will it take to mend the canoes?"

"Not less than an hour," was the reply; "possibly more."

Without another word Colburn strode away, and they heard the sounds of his crashing through the bush along the river bank till they died away in the distance.

Stilson drew a long breath.

"If only he'd never come back!" said he fervently.

Mayberry was too mortified at having been involved in what, to him, was a disgraceful scene, to make any comment. He silently repacked the articles that had been taken out for Robertson's benefit, and the Indians methodically gave their attention to the mending of the canoes.

CHAPTER VII.

GEZHIK'S CROOKED KNIFE.

THERE was nothing further that Mayberry could do for Robertson, and he was useless to the Indians; hammer in hand, therefore, he sought to distract his mind by an examination of the ledges in the vicinity.

He was not very successful. The rocks offered no indications to arouse more than academic interest, and his spirit rankled with the scene in which he had borne so unwilling and, as he feared, so unseemly a part.

He thought of the scholarly seclusion of the university where thousands of young men, and old, too, struggled with more or less intensity and earnestness for the prizes of learning, and where all was dignity and peace. He was homesick for a certain alcove in Gore Hall, where he had done so many a grateful grind preliminary to an examination.

And he thought of Rose Osborne.

When he returned to Robertson he assumed a nonchalance that was far from sincere, and asked, "How goes it? Do you think we'd better go into camp here?"

"No, sir," replied the woodsman. "Every mile gained to-day is so much progress, and there need be no great delay for me. I allow that I've got to mend, for I'm bunged worse than the canoe, but I can mend while traveling."

"But you can't think of swinging a paddle any more than you can think of walking. Arm and ankle both must have time to mend."

"I know, sir. It gives me a groutch to sit here and do nothing, and I never but once before was a passenger in a canoe, and then it was because I was fool enough to work before I was ready for it. But we can go on. The boys will soon have the canoes in the water."

"We've got it all arranged," said Stilson, who lay on his back near by, "and we're only waiting for the Czar to come back and upset everything."

"Speaking of that," Mayberry interrupted, "don't you think it will be a good plan for us three to adopt the Ojibway method of argument? I don't know when I've seen anything more impressive than their non-resisting attitude. There's nothing to be done about it."

Robertson smiled.

"You're quite right, sir," said he. "When an Indian strikes, he's done. No argument, threat, loss of job, or even promise of more pay will move him. He's done and that's all there is to it. I really feared the other night that we'd have to get on without Mukwa."

"Thank goodness you saved us that loss!" exclaimed Mayberry. "But how about my suggestion? These incessant rows are dreadfully disagreeable. It does seem as if we ought to avoid them somehow."

"There's only one way," said Stilson.

"Well?"

"Rap Colburn on the head and bury him before he begins to talk."

Mayberry could not smile at this, though Stilson seemed to regard it as a high grade witticism.

"Seriously," Mayberry began, when Stilson cut in:

"The man's impossible. We whites can't take the same attitude that the reds do because we're white—which

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isn't meaning any disrespect to your friends, Don; I think they're bully fellows. But you understand me."

Robertson made no response. He was now the former Hudson Bay factor; it was no part of his business to discuss the peculiarities of his superior officer. Stilson went on:

"You'll have to admit it, Mayberry. You've been hot under the collar yourself twice to-day."

"Yes, I am ashamed to say I have."

"Rot! There's no shame about it. If it wasn't for the business that brought us here, I'd have cut loose long ago."

"We're not out for a picnic!"

The discussion might have gone further, and it is not impossible that it might have led to some plan of conduct; for Mayberry found a grateful relief in Stilson's talk in that it was more amicable and free from petty snarling than usual; but at this moment Colburn came stalking from the forest.

With portentous solemnity he went to the canoe that Mukwa was smearing with hot pitch and looked it over.

No need to wonder how he was going to behave. He had been defeated in the altercation, but he was still the leader. His every movement and attitude were calculated to proclaim as much.

Mayberry felt his gorge rising, and turned away, occupying himself with carrying a pack to the margin of the river.

"Think you'll be able to stand the rest of to-day's journey?" Colburn asked of Robertson.

"Yes, sir," replied the woodsman, "but I shall have to go as a passenger. It won't make any great difference, sir, for it'll be all down stream to the lake and a short paddle then to the outlet, so Mukwa tells me."

It was quite evident that Colburn had foreseen some contingency of this kind, and that he had decided upon his course, for, without allowing time for any of the others to make a suggestion, he said:

"All right, I'll take Gezhik in the canoe with me and you can have Mukwa. Mayberry and Stilson are expert enough now to get along together, if there isn't any portage."

"I think so, sir. There's no more portage necessary to-day."

Inasmuch as this arrangement was precisely the one planned by Robertson and Stilson, there was not only no objection, but a general sense of relief. It seemed to promise a more agreeable conduct of the expedition thereafter.

Stilson ventured the opinion to Mayberry that Colburn had "taken a tumble to himself," to which Mayberry responded that he hoped so. In fact, he was little encouraged for the future, though he shared the present relief to the full.

When the injured canoe had been patched, the Indians examined the one that Gezhik had carried over the portage. It needed no attention and both were launched.

Packs were put aboard and Robertson was assisted to a place in the bow of Mukwa's canoe. The start was made immediately, Colburn, of course, in the lead.

It was a grateful contrast to the first part of the day's journey, the more so that the current of the river was swift enough to reduce paddling to little more effort than was required to steer, but Colburn, with his characteristic energy, made hard work of it, and, under his insistence, Gezhik more than dipped his paddle in the water. Consequently the others lost sight of the forward canoe within a half mile of the starting place.

Not long afterward, however, they caught up with and passed it, for the voyagers had stopped at an open place on the bank, thrown out the pack and fastened the canoe.

Robertson, who came along first, was for turning aside also, but Mukwa had no sooner begun to direct his canoe to shore than Colburn called, "Go ahead, I'll overhaul you in a few minutes."

Mukwa and Robertson went on without asking the cause of the delay. They didn't need to; but Mayberry, following shortly after, wanted to know if anything was wrong.

"Nothing serious," replied Colburn indifferently. "We'll be all right in a few minutes."

He would not have them come to shore, and, accordingly, they went on also.

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Colburn's canoe was aleak, to the imminent danger of spoiling the provisions.

A seam had parted at the bow so far above the water-line that not a drop entered as long as only the pack was on board; but when the two men were in—Colburn at the bow—the added weight was sufficient to bring the leak in evidence. Colburn was first aware of it when he found his knees soaking.

What regrets may have passed through his mind that he did not have the canoe examined, as Robertson had suggested, cannot be set down here, for we have only Gezhik's testimony as to what happened.

It might be supposed that Colburn, in his hot-headed way, would proceed to take it out of the Indian for having permitted a start to be made without examination; but it can be seen that, if he did that, he would have laid himself open to conviction for carelessness in not having the examination made at the proper time; and that, furthermore, he might have been compelled to acknowledge his error to Robertson.

Be that as it may, what happened, according to Gezhik's subsequent brief report, was a turning to the land at the first convenient spot, and a caution from Colburn to the Indian not to speak to Mukwa when Robertson's canoe should come by.

It was out of the question to use the pitch pot unless a great deal of time was to be lost. So the canoe was hauled out and emptied, and Colburn cut sticks from the bushes near to lay on the bottom, under the pack, in order to keep it above the water.

By this device, and an occasional brief halt to pour out the water, he reckoned that the rest of the day's trip could be covered without mending.

He found it necessary to pause for emptying the canoe before he had caught up with Mayberry, and when he went on again he had Gezhik take the bow place, for the Indian was the lighter by at least fifty pounds.

The canoe filled more slowly after that, but it filled, and there had to be another halt for pouring the water out, and this before either of the other canoes had been brought into view.

Shortly after this pause the river ended in the lake of which Mukwa had spoken.

It was by no means a small lake. The hills back of the western shore were miles away, but it appeared that the outlet was at the eastern end, and, as the Indian had said, but a short distance from the inlet.

Colburn presently saw the other canoes drawn out of the water and lying on the edge of a broad expanse of flat rock. Mukwa and the whites were sitting or standing near, evidently waiting for him to catch up. He turned the canoe toward them.

"What are you stopping for?" he asked.

Mayberry answered: "Partly for you and partly because the rapids at the outlet appear to be swifter and more dangerous than Robertson had supposed from Mukwa's description."

"Oh," snarled Colburn, "then Mukwa doesn't know it all, eh?"

"Robertson says," said Mayberry, ignoring the interruption, "that to shoot the rapids safely it would require that each man in the canoe should be well enough to take his paddle and look out for himself if anything went wrong."

"Then the main reason for delay is that Robertson is laid up."

"We can portage past the rapids, which would mean the carrying of Robertson, or we can shoot them by taking a man in the canoe with the Indians and sending them back each trip for another man, or we can go into camp here for a time. Of course we look to you for a decision."

"Oh!"

That was all Colburn said for a moment, and it was a decidedly noncommittal monosyllable.

He looked at Mayberry as if to determine whether the deference of the party, as expressed through him, was sincere or if there was a veiled sarcasm. Mayberry had stated the situation dispassionately and without recommendation; and Stilson kept his promise, and did not open his mouth.

"I'll take a look at the rapids and see for myself," said Colburn, which, perhaps, was just what should have been expected of him.

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It was certainly better than ordering further advance without investigation.

He turned the canoe about and paddled slowly toward the place where plainly the outlet was to be found. Even at the flat rock the roar of the rapids could be heard faintly.

"I wouldn't go too close, sir," called Robertson.

Robertson should have known better. All previous experience should have taught him that the one thing to make Colburn run into peril was just this kind of a warning.

Of course Gezhik said nothing until it was too late. He was there to obey orders, and he obeyed them, though, when the placid lake began to snarl, he did put his paddle hard into the water in the attempt to turn the front end toward shore.

A canoe is such a deceitful article, in a way; it is so easy to push along, it responds so readily to the slightest swish of the paddle.

But the canoe is one thing and the calm surface of the lake is another; quite different is the water that begins suddenly to pour and tumble over a steep declivity. And it may be added that experience at such a time is still another thing.

Colburn found the graceful craft rushing toward a gully between the hills whence came a roaring, and where he caught a glimpse of foam.

It was enough to decide him. The flat rock appeared at that moment to be a most desirable camping place.

He thought even then that he had perceived the emergency in ample time, but as he dug his paddle into the swift water, he saw only too surely that the canoe did not respond with its accustomed readiness.

"Pull, you red beggar!" he cried.

The Indian took the command without the slightest offense, but it meant nothing to him. He was not in a rowboat and wouldn't have known what to do if he had been.

"What do you want?" he asked, turning his head.

He tried to infer Colburn's desire from a glance at his paddle, but he learned little. The leader was experimenting, which is natural for an inexperienced man but not exactly commendable.

"Back her!" bawled Colburn; "turn her to the shore! Anything to keep from going down the rapids."

Aye, Gezhik may have thought—he never said what he thought at the moment—but it is generally a good plan for a canoe crew to be united in endeavor.

Gezhik tried to back-paddle, but the current was running too powerfully to make that successful. It was possible to run diagonally to shore.

"I do it," said Gezhik. "You let-um 'lone."

A most injudicious manner of advising Colburn at any time, but it can hardly be said that the Indian should have known better. Colburn continued to paddle, and, in spite of his efforts, the Indian brought the canoe close to the shore.

At just the right moment he gave the paddle the necessary impulse to cause the canoe to lie alongside the bank without injuring its fragile side. Colburn, thinking to assist in this delicate operation, reached for an overhanging bush, caught it and held on.

The canoe, like an animate being, shocked at this disturbance, immediately turned over.

Gezhik uttered no cry. With a celerity that would have astonished Colburn had that energetic individual not been giving his undivided attention to saving his own carcass, the Indian flung his paddle to the shore, caught at the grass with one hand and the gunwale with the other.

He held to both till he had pulled himself out, when, with a display of muscular force that also should have called for astonished and favorable comment from the leader, he lifted the canoe, filled though it was, and turned it bottom upward.

And at this interesting moment, when Colburn at last had scrambled out and could give his attention to things generally, the provision pack was bobbing cheerfully down the rapids.

"You infernal fool!" howled Colburn. "Why did you let that happen?"

He leaped for the Indian, both fists doubled.

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An acute attack of speediness had seized upon Gezhik that evening. Before Colburn had advanced half the few paces necessary to bring them into collision the Indian had set down the canoe and whipped a crooked knife from a pocket.

The blade dripped water, but it gleamed suggestively. Gezhik's lips apparently had not had time to change from their smiling appearance, but Colburn must have noted that the irregular teeth behind them were more in evidence now than usual.

The leader halted abruptly.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Get-um grub," replied the Indian.

Immediately, but with more of his customary moderation, he put the crooked knife away, picked up the canoe, set it in the water, grasped his paddle and leaped aboard.

The impetus of the leap sent the canoe from shore. Gezhik squatted at once in the middle and began to paddle, pointing the craft straight down the turbulent current.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APPALLING DISCOVERY.

COLBURN'S jaw dropped as he watched the canoe leap over the increasing waves of the rapids. A moment and the canoe seemed to spring clear from the water.

It shot past the foam-flecked spot he had seen shortly before, veered sharply to one side and disappeared around a bend in the river.

Then the madness with which he had started to assault the guide gave way to choking apprehension—not for Gezhik, but for what he had gone to save. What would become of the expedition and its all-important purpose without that pack?

Down deep in his heart the leader knew that he was to blame. His dripping clothes began to feel chilly. He wrung the water from his wristbands. What would the other fellows say?

He turned his head toward the expanse of flat rock.

It was plainly visible; hence the catastrophe must have been seen by the men. Only one was in sight now—Robertson, sitting, but leaning forward on his sound arm, looking intently, as if his wilderness-trained eyes could see beyond the beginning of the rapids, beyond the bend in the river.

Colburn shivered and his heart felt sick.

There was a sound of steps in the bush. They approached rapidly, and as he looked that way Mukwa appeared, pipe in mouth, parting the branches before him with both hands.

Instinctively Colburn put his hand to the pocket where he carried a revolver.

Mukwa passed him without so much as a glance at him, dashed into the next thicket and disappeared.

A moment later Mayberry and Stilson came panting to the spot.

They were too breathless to ask questions at first, and, moreover, it seemed to them unnecessary to do so. It was clearly up to Colburn to explain.

With an appearance of entire self-mastery he removed his coat and began to wring it.

"I'm glad the clothing pack is dry," said he. "You fellows might make yourselves useful by getting wood for a fire back there. We shall camp there to-night."

"Oh," said Stilson, "you've made up your mind, have you? We are ever so much obliged. Perhaps you won't mind getting supper for us."

Colburn's eyes blazed, but he maintained his assumed composure.

"The redskin will recover the grub," said he.

"Good!" retorted Stilson; "he'll find the flour all in a batter ready for baking. Let's get the oven heated for him, Mayberry."

"Don't make a bad matter worse," Mayberry suggested. "Do you really think, Mr. Colburn, that the Indian will be able to recover the provisions?"

"Why shouldn't I? The noble red man seems to know how to do everything in this country. This sort of thing, doubtless, has happened a score of times in their experience."

"Huh!" interjected Stilson irrepressibly.

Colburn shot a hateful glance at him

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and went on, for he seemed to think that his only salvation lay in minimizing the disaster and his own responsibility for it.

"If the lazy beggar had only begun to work when I told him to, nothing would have happened."

"Hell!" snorted Stilson, "do you suppose we didn't see it? What do you suppose Robertson said?"

Colburn declared forcibly that he didn't care several curses what Robertson said. But Stilson insisted on telling him.

"'The fool!' said he, when you began to toy with the current, 'he'll lose the canoe and grub both!' And when you grabbed that bush, 'Oh, the dommed fool!' said Robertson, with a groan. 'Now we're done for sure!' And we were done for, Colburn, before he'd finished speaking."

Robertson, in Colburn's expressed opinion, was several kinds of a calamity howler. If he'd had anything like his vaunted skill as a woodsman he wouldn't have missed his footing and come to grief. Then there would have been no upset——

"Because," jawed Stilson, "Robertson would have been managing the canoe. You'd better go back and captain a ball nine in the kindergarten. Hi, don't you hit me! There'll be trouble if you do, so help me!"

Colburn's grip on himself had weakened at last. Sneering taunts were as difficult for him to endure as it was easy for him to utter them.

Moreover, there was not the slightly restraining influence of Mayberry's presence, for the geologist had gone on in Mukwa's track.

There followed a race back to the bare rock where Robertson sat, his heart boiling in his helplessness. Stilson won quite as much by reason of the fear that lent him speed as by the fact that Colburn was impeded by his wet garments.

Temper on both sides was somewhat exhausted by the exercise. Stilson seated himself, panting, near Robertson, but he had a stone in his hand and was prepared to spring up and defend himself if he had to.

But Colburn merely glanced savagely at him and went to the clothing pack, which he opened, and he gave the following several minutes to effecting a change of clothes.

Then, without demanding Stilson's assistance, he unpacked the tents and began the work of setting one up.

Robertson was watching him between half-closed eyes, the lines of his mouth drawn deeply down. He felt his unfitness to cope with a new emergency that was plainly at hand.

"That's no place for a tent," said he, in a low tone, to Stilson.

"Tell him so, then."

"There's wind in the clouds over yonder, and there isn't slant enough on the rock any way. The camp should be a bit back, just under the trees there."

"Why don't you tell him?"

"Tell him?" and Robertson looked almost appealingly at his companion; "haven't I been telling him ever since we left Pahquatasing? What good does it do? Ah, if I had the use of my arm and leg!"

"But you don't talk with your arm and leg, Don. Go ahead. You can't make matters any worse, and it's possible you may save him from some new blunder."

"Where's Mr. Mayberry? He has a better way of talking——"

"No, he hasn't. He's gone with Mukwa, to help recover the grub. Go ahead, Don!"

Thus persuaded, the woodsman spoke aloud.

"Excuse me, Mr. Colburn, but there's a big wind coming out of those clouds in the west."

"So?" Colburn responded, without interrupting his work.

"Aye."

"What of it?"

"It'll make this a very unpleasant, not to say risky, place to camp in, sir."

"Where would you have the camp, then?"

"In the shelter of the trees at the back, sir. That's the natural place for——"

"But I supposed a camp site was always chosen with a view to the proximity of fresh water. There's nothing better than this lake water, is there? And there's no stream in the woods."

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"The water's all right, sir——"

"Well, then, we'll camp near it."

"But it's not a long carry to the trees for what little water we shall need." (It was no more than a hundred feet.) "The Indians always choose a spot sheltered by the trees, sir."

Colburn desisted working to make his answer.

"You're wrong, Don," said he, with an assumption of the impressively quiet manner, "you don't know anything about the Indians. When I was crossing the plains of the United States I saw a hundred Indians for every one I've seen in Canada, and those Indians always camped in the open. They avoided the trees as if they were poisonous, and I don't know but they are. I've an idea, any way, that it's healthier to camp in the open and so I shall put up my tent here."

Colburn was in deeper water in this discussion than he realized. The Ojibways are forest Indians and naturally seek the shelter of the trees; the plains Indians as naturally camp in the open.

He cared nothing for the customs of the country, nothing for Robertson's warning about the wind. Opposition merely stimulated him to obstinacy, and he kept at work.

"He'll have to get another tent mate, then," Robertson muttered. "I'll sleep under the trees if I have nothing more than a blanket over me, which has been the case often enough before, so I shan't care."

Stilson sniffed his contempt and discontent with the arrangements, but wisely held his tongue in check.

One tent was up and infirmly held by stones laid upon the guy ropes when Mayberry and the Indians returned. Gezhik was carrying the canoe and each of the others had his hands full of small articles.

"Well," said Mayberry cheerfully, "the lake and streams are full of fish and there are deer in the woods. I've saved the salt. It's pretty thoroughly soaked, but I suppose it will dry if exposed to the air and sun for a day."

"Is that all you saved?" asked Colburn, and his tone was not only serious, but free, for the moment, from the twang of fault-finding.

"Not quite, but the salt is the most important article, I think. The pack went to pieces against the rocks. We waded in and got what we could. Some of the tinned stuff is apparently all right, but we shall have to get on without flour. The tea is missing, too, but we found two cans of condensed milk."

"Much good that'll do!" exclaimed Stilson.

Mayberry laughed.

"Got to make the best of it," said he. "I believe the fish hooks and lines were in that pack, weren't they?"

"Yes," Colburn replied.

"They're gone, too, but Mukwa says he can replace them—Indian-fashion—if he can shoot a caribou. Make a bone hook, you know, and a line from the hide. We shall get on, I think."

Colburn went over the salvage, while the others looked on and tried to anticipate the pleasures and effects of a steady meat diet. The situation was too blue for expression. Even Stilson found his tongue tied.

"Is that all you fellows could find?" Colburn asked.

There was his familiar complaint in the tone and Mayberry was set on edge by it. He tried to conceal all signs of resentment, but the best he could say was, "I suppose there's more in the river below the rapids."

"Why didn't you bring it, then?"

The demand came with the sharpness of a pistol shot, but, while it served to anger the geologist, it also aroused in him to the full a conviction that now, of all times, a quarrel must be avoided; and he felt his own responsibility to that end.

"Mr. Colburn," said he mildly, "we have done our best, and I believe that if we had all been searching no more could have been saved. You can go down and see for yourself what the conditions are. The river is a mad torrent at the spot where the pack got stranded against the rocks and was pounded to pieces. The situation is as you see it. We're not going to starve—not if we can get game and fish. Meantime the Indians might be sent back to Pahquatasing to bring down a fresh supply. I can put in a few days of exploration here to advantage, I think."

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Colburn listened with his head down. He was looking over the scant stock that had been saved as if he might see more than was plainly before him. The more he looked the worse it seemed, and thus it was to the others also.

Much of the stuff was, like the condensed milk, of little service without other articles that were missing. There was a food supply in sight equal to about one day's demands.

"Well," said Colburn at last, "I'll think it over. I'll sleep on it."

He stood up as he spoke and his eyes fell upon the Indians. Then his wrath burst all bounds and he let forth a torrent of abuse that included everything—whites, reds, and circumstances—all save himself.

It was so violent as to be absurd, but it was, none the less, exasperating to hear.

"For Heaven's sake," said Mayberry to Stilson, "let him rave it out. He may feel better for it and we shan't be any the worse off," and Stilson so far complied as to lie on his back with his knees crossed, the very picture of indifference, which was nearly as irritating to Colburn as a direct retort.

Mayberry thought again of Rose Osborne with a feeling of profound pity while the tirade endured. It was over at length, and without coming to a climax of physical violence. Nobody was assaulted and nobody defended himself from the abuse.

"Set up the tents," the leader concluded, and the Indians looked, as usual, inquiringly at Robertson. Before the woodsman could speak, Colburn added, "You fellows can pitch your camp where you blame please. My tent is going to be where I have put it."

Directions accordingly were given to have the guy ropes of the leader's tent weighted with more stones, and to set up the others in the shelter of the trees.

When it came to building a fire, the alarming discovery was made that all the matches in the outfit had been swept down the river, save what few were carried in the men's pockets.

There were enough for the present, but none was used that night, for Mukwa resorted to the ancient device of striking fire from flint and using punk found near by as kindling. By nightfall two fires were blazing.

Robertson could be as obstinate in his inoffensive way as Colburn, and when it developed that he purposed to sleep on the bare ground rather than share the leader's tent with him, a readjustment of tent mates was necessary; for Mayberry would not countenance Robertson's plan.

"It would be all right," he said, "if you were well; but it is highly important that you should be up and about as soon as possible, and we mustn't risk you to unnecessary exposure. Turn in with Stilson for to-night and I'll roll up in Colburn's tent."

The leader assented to this arrangement without comment, and all turned in soon after eating their first meal of meat diet—canned goods that tasted well enough but that bade fair to be exhausted by the next day noon.

Colburn said little during the evening. The others planned a hunt with a caribou in view.

"Give an Indian a caribou," said Robertson, "and he can be depended on to supply his party with food for a long time. While the animal itself is being eaten he'll make lines and hooks from the skin and bones. Let somebody bring in a caribou and we shan't starve."

The wind he had foretold began to blow with the setting of the sun. At dusk the lake was crinkled with it, and by dark the waves were pounding against the flat expanse of rock and drenching Colburn's camp-fire with spray.

Colburn pretended to be perfectly satisfied. Perhaps he was. There is no knowing except from what he said, and he did not utter a word to suggest that he had any misgivings about pitching his camp where he had.

As for Mayberry, it was all one to him. He would not turn the Indians out of their shelter for his own sake, he wouldn't permit Robertson to run the risk of exposure, and he knew that it would be folly to ask Stilson to sleep in the same tent with the leader.

He turned in early and was sound asleep before Colburn rolled himself in his blanket and lay down beside him.

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The storm was a howler. It roared through the tree-tops, lashed the lake to a fury and by midnight brought along a deluge of rain.

There was such a tow-row in the foliage and such a racket of rain on the tent that Stilson was awakened. He lay listening for a moment, rather solemnly impressed by the tumult, reflecting on his surroundings and wondering if he could really stand it till food of the conventional kind could be brought to them.

He was inclined to despair of it as he thought of Colburn's blundering leadership.

"Give him rope enough," thought Stilson, "and he'll hang us all. There's mighty little hope for the expedition as long as he's at the head of it."

Then it occurred to him to wonder why five men, counting the Indians, should deem it proper to yield so abjectly to the leadership of any man?

Colburn had the authority merely by appointment. Up to date he had come as near wrecking the expedition as he possibly could.

"Better call it wrecked already," said Stilson silently, "and wrecked beyond hope of salvage unless we mutiny. Why not?"

It was an alluring thought. He could not but contemplate himself in the position of leader, the natural position for him, inasmuch as he controlled the purse.

As for Mayberry, he was, doubtless, content with his peculiar position of scientist to the party. The others were merely employees.

Stilson wondered if Mayberry would come into a scheme for mutiny? There would have to be a grand row, but with a combination of two members of the expedition and three faithful employees, the outcome could not long remain in doubt.

As this manner of dreaming possessed his mind, the desire to see Colburn subordinated grew apace and aroused with it the fresh memories of insults and abuse till Stilson was aglow with hate.

Meantime the tempest seemed to be increasing in fury. The lake roared in a way that reminded him of the ocean, and now and again he heard a sound that suggested that a tree had been blown down.

He chilled a little at the possibility of some tree near by falling and crushing in the tent.

Under the influence of this direful thought he sat up, undid the cords of the tent flap and looked out. A dash of rain full in the face caused him to draw back hurriedly, but it was only to look out more cautiously and with a fresh thrill, for he was sure he had seen somebody moving through the murky darkness toward the tent.

Yes, somebody was coming slowly, picking his way, it seemed, and burdened somehow.

Stilson had a vague sense of trouble—not quite fear, but he did see a vision of Indian atrocities, and he was half-minded to arouse the helpless Robertson, who seemed to be sleeping as peacefully through the storm as if he were a babe in a cradle.

But Stilson did not awake the woodsman. Instead, he braved the rain, with his face thrust out between the flaps, and called:

"Hello, there! What's going on?"

The figure then turned more towards the tent and came close, when Stilson perceived that it was Mayberry.

"Our tent has blown down," said Mayberry.

"Huh! If it was only Colburn I wouldn't care."

"He doesn't seem to care. He won't help put it up, and, for that matter, it couldn't be put up out there while this wind blows. I'm going to see if I can make a lean-to of it against the rock just behind here."

"What with? The tent."

"Yes; I've got it."

That was the burden that made Mayberry's figure bulge so oddly in the obscurity before Stilson knew who he was.

"What does Colburn say?" asked Stilson.

"Not a word. I called to him and even shook him, but he won't pay any attention. So I let him lie."

"Of course."

"He can't be any worse off by morning than he is now—nor I, either, I guess. I'm soaked."

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"Won't you come in here?"

"No, thanks. No sense in adding discomfort to you and Robertson. I'll shelter myself somehow with this and sleep the night out. I don't mind, really. I'm so sleepy that I didn't know when the tent blew over our heads. I waked with the wetting I was getting."

"Squeeze in here if you want to."

"It would be no more comfortable to me than to be outside, and I should be sure to moisten you and Robertson. That might not do for him. Never mind me, Stilson. I noticed that rock while we were making camp and thought how an Indian without a tent would undoubtedly make a lean-to there. I've got the poles to which the guy ropes were fastened and I'm sure I can fix up something that I can crawl under."

"Want any help?"

"Oh, no! Don't disturb yourself."

Mayberry went on and Stilson remained for the moment peering into the darkness toward the lake, trying to see Colburn's recumbent form, and chuckling somewhat as he thought of the infinite soaking the leader would get.

Then he closed the flaps and lay down again, but he was long in getting to sleep, thinking of his projected mutiny. He wondered how he had talked so long with Mayberry without suggesting it.

High wind and rain seldom keep company for long. In this instance they not only parted, but disappeared before morning.

The sun rose in a clear sky, and just as the full light of day was come, Gezhik shook the flap of Robertson's tent and called in Ojibway. Stilson was not aroused by the summons, but Robertson responded at once.

"What is it, Gezhik?"

"Only one man there."

"Where?"

"On the rock. No tent, only one man, and he won't wake up."

At this moment Mayberry crawled from under the shelter he had made when the storm was at its height.

"Good-morning, Gezhik," said he, and at the same time Gezhik said: "Here's the other."

"Then there's nothing the matter, eh?" queried Robertson.

"Yes. Come out and see."

Robertson reached over and shook Stilson.

"Better get up," said he, "and see what Gezhik wants. I can tell from the sound of his voice that something's gone wrong."

"Has Colburn blundered again?" asked Stilson, yawning.

Mayberry was at the door.

"I think," said Robertson, "that if you gentlemen will help me I'll go out. Gezhik will have it so. I don't know what ails him."

Accordingly the two whites supported the woodsman from the tent. They had no sooner issued than their eyes fell on Colburn lying in his blanket on the bare rock a short hundred feet away.

Mukwa stood with folded arms looking down at him. It was a suggestive tableau, and it suggested what proved to be the tragic reality.

Colburn was dead.

CHAPTER IX.

"ONE OF US THREE."

THE five men who lived exchanged startled glances. In every eye was inquiry, and to each man of them there seemed to be suspicion also in the glances of the others.

Hastily they looked away from each other and fixed their eyes upon the mute object on the ground that had until so recently been a torment to every one of them.

Stilson gaped, and his knees shook while he looked. He was ghastly pale.

Mayberry was the first to speak. His sunburned cheeks were bloodless, too.

"Who found him this way?" he asked.

That was an easy question, so much easier than what would have seemed to be the more natural one, "Who did this?" for if ever murder was manifest in the appearance of the dead, it was doubly manifest here.

Colburn was rolled in his blanket, both arms close to his body. He was on his side, as he might be in sleep, and both knees were slightly bent as if the shock of death had been so instant that

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the convulsion of resisting nature was the briefest possible.

Robertson undertook to answer the question.

"It must be plain enough," said he hoarsely, "that I didn't find him. Gezhik called me just now. I was asleep when he first spoke."

He broke off here and addressed Gezhik in Ojibway. The response, uttered in a low, and, it seemed, sullen tone, was in the same tongue.

"He says," Robertson translated, "that he went to the lake for water while Mukwa attended to the fire, and found him as you see him now."

Mayberry, overcame the horror of the situation sufficiently to kneel by the dead man and make a closer examination of the conditions. This was not done in any hope of finding a lingering spark of life, for the first glance had shown that Colburn was beyond recall.

His head was smashed in. There was a dent at the temple so deep that no doubt could exist as to the breaking of the bones there.

The skin was broken also, and blood had streamed forth. It had coagulated, such drops as had not been washed away by the rain.

"The body is cold," said Mayberry. "I know very little about such things, but I should say that he must have been dead some hours."

"Since the middle of the night?" asked Stilson.

The question was more suggestive than the manner of asking it. Mayberry seemed to feel the implication, for he started, and, for a moment, kept his eyes down.

Then he looked up, meeting Stilson's eyes squarely, and replied:

"Yes, I should say so. I take it for granted he was alive when he turned in."

Stilson started at this, and the reason for his special agitation was manifest in the remark that followed:

"You mean to call attention to the fact that I was the last man to see him alive."

"I meant nothing of the kind," said Mayberry. "I don't know who last saw him alive."

"Well, so far as last evening is concerned, I did. I'm not denying anything." Stilson was regaining his self-possession rapidly. "The Indians had turned in. I was passing on my way from the lake when he went into his tent and rolled himself up. You seemed to be asleep at the moment."

There was an emphasis on the word "seemed" that was unmistakable. Mayberry's cheeks became paler still.

"Stilson," said he, "nobody has asked you to deny anything. I was asleep when Colburn turned in. I did not hear him."

"You waked when the tent blew over."

"Afterwards."

"Well, afterwards. Was he alive then?"

"I don't know."

"And yet the man who struck that blow must have been certain that it would cause instant death."

Mayberry stood up.

"I should be a fool," he said coldly, "to pretend that I do not understand you. You charge me with murder. Don't interrupt. You will charge me with it before the proper authorities if you believe what you say. If that is what you believe, and if that is what you mean to do, speak plainly now, like a man, and I'll give you my answer—like a man!"

They eyed each other for a moment, Mayberry pale and stern, Stilson pale and quivering.

"I won't say anything rash," said Stilson presently. "I was only thinking out loud. Of course there are others," and he made an almost imperceptible gesture toward the Indians.

"It seems to me," said Mayberry, "that before we go to casting accusations right and left, before we even harbor suspicions, we'd better see if this could not have been the result of accident."

"Aye," responded Robertson, "look to that, gentlemen. Ye say the tent blew down? I'm not surprised. I saw the wind coming, and I know the winds hereabouts."

Mayberry gave him the same account of the midnight disaster that he had given to Stilson, making it a little more detailed.

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"It may have been the blowing over of the tent that aroused me," he said. "I certainly had an idea that I heard a noise of something falling, which might well have been the poles, for, of course, they must have been yanked up from the stones. The tent evidently was lifted into the air and collapsed, falling about twenty feet behind us.

"I spoke to Colburn as soon as I realized that we had no cover and that we were getting wet. His failure to answer, even when I shook him, did not surprise me, for I remembered his obstinacy and regarded it as equal to soaking there the rest of the night rather than acknowledge that he'd made a mistake."

"The tent pole couldn't have made that wound," said Robertson.

"No; but perhaps one of the stones that held the guy ropes might have been lifted——"

"And dropped with all that force?" interrupted Stilson; "I guess not! It's impossible."

"So I think, too," responded Mayberry, "and there's another thing I think of: if Colburn had been dead at the time I shook him I should have known it—that is—no—I'm not so sure."

Mayberry stopped in some confusion. His speech for once had run ahead of his thoughts. Stilson noted the fact with blazing eyes, but he pressed his thin lips together and was silent.

"What I had in mind," Mayberry resumed after a moment, "is the fact that the body now is wholly unresponsive to the touch and cold. It doesn't yield readily as a live man does. But time has to pass after death before the limbs stiffen. He might have been dead an hour when I shook him, and, in the darkness, I would not have noticed."

Stilson looked askance at the Indians. Both stood motionless at a little distance, in the characteristic attitude of the red man—arms folded, head slightly bent forward.

"We'd best study the possibility of accident thoroughly," Mayberry went on, bending again over the body.

A moment later he reached across it to the irregular line of stones that had been laid upon the pole to which the guy ropes on that side had been fastened, picked up one.

It was wedge-shape, about ten inches long, and three and a half inches across the larger end, which was not flat but rounded and rough.

He looked steadfastly at this for many seconds and then held it up to the others.

"Well?" said Stilson faintly.

For answer, Mayberry placed the larger end of the wedge upon the wound in Colburn's brow and turned it around a bit.

"Do you see?" he asked.

They did. The stone fitted the wound perfectly.

"Here, then, is the implement," said Mayberry, in a musing tone. "It should not be very difficult to determine whether it was wielded by the hand of man, or whether the storm did the work. You see this side of it? The color of the stone is not the same along this side as on the others. That shows that the stone was recently detached from some larger, or, at all events, from some other stone. We may be able to find the other fragment here. Let's look for it, as anything of this sort may throw light on the matter."

He proceeded to lift, one after another, the stones that had been used to weight the guy ropes on that side, and Stilson fell to the same work on the other. Robertson sat down and joined in the search as well as he could.

For some minutes no word was spoken. Every stone that had been used in securing the tent was many times larger and heavier than the fragment that fitted the wound. Not one was found that showed the recent loss of so much as a grain.

"This proves just one thing," said Stilson, after all the stones had been examined; "the implement, as you call it, was brought here by the person who did the deed."

"Did he wrench it from some other stone, or ledge?" asked Mayberry.

"How can I tell?" demanded Stilson resentfully. "The theory of a fragment is yours, not mine."

"I meant nothing unpleasant by my question," said Mayberry. "As for my

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theory, it appears to prove itself, though it is probably utterly unimportant."

"Why have we worked so long to prove it then?"

"I had an idea that if we could find that this had been broken from some stone near by, it might suggest directly that a man killed Colburn; that is, that he broke a stone to pieces for the sake of getting a fragment that could be used as a weapon."

"In which case he would hardly have smashed a stone so near the spot where the intended victim was sleeping."

"That sounds reasonable."

"So, to prove that part of the theory, we should have to hunt at a distance from the scene of the murder."

Stilson's voice was at a whisper when he came to the last word. It was hardly audible.

He cleared his throat and added: "But it seems to me that it's not worth proving. What conceivable accident could have lifted this stone high enough to fall with the force sufficient to make that wound? How far would it have to fall, Mayberry?"

"I don't know."

"And you a scientist?"

"I am not specially informed in statics."

"Mr. Mayberry," said Robertson, "I understand you're a sharp on rocks. Is that so?"

"I am a geologist."

"Does this piece seem to be the same as the rest of the rocks in sight hereabout?"

"I've been thinking of that. It does not."

Stilson shuddered.

"And so we've been wasting time hunting around here," he said. "We've got to do something, that's clear; but what it is, I confess I hardly know, though I suppose I ought to, for I take it that the leadership of the party now falls to me."

He looked at the others as if he expected assent or dissent, and his heart was anxious.

Neither of his companions replied. Mayberry's eyes had a far-away look, and Robertson was silent, probably because it could not appear to him that he had any right to a voice in the matter.

"Is there any question about it, Mayberry?" asked Stilson.

"About what?"

"The leadership—command of the expedition—you know."

"Not that I am aware of. Do you want to take command? You're welcome to."

It was clear enough even to Stilson's not over analytical mind that Mayberry regarded the leadership as of the least consequence, and Stilson almost felt nettled at his indifference.

But he was more troubled by the fact that, in his own mind, there was a doubt as to whether he wanted the coveted position. It had heavy responsibilities now.

This doubt endured but a moment, however. He had a lively memory of some of his recent remarks about Colburn.

Had he not actually suggested killing the man? Of course nobody took him seriously, but what dreadful tangle might not those hasty, foolish words get him into if he did not take the reins now and control his destiny hereafter?

He therefore attempted to rise to the occasion.

"The first thing," said he, "is to show proper respect for the dead. None of us liked him living, but we should have no grudge against him now."

This manifestation of magnanimity was prefatory to a request to Mayberry to help him cover Colburn's face. They did so with the dead man's blanket, and then Stilson asked the others to step aside for a moment.

"I can't talk about this thing so near him," said he, "and I want to get out of ear-shot of the Indians. Can't you set them at some work, Don?"

Robertson spoke to the Indians at some length.

"I have told them," said he, "to go on getting breakfast. We've got to eat."

"As long as the food lasts," added Stilson.

He walked down to the margin of the lake and along it to a spot where several large stones lay scattered about. There he sat down and waited for the

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others, who came slowly, on account of Robertson's lameness.

The woodsman leaned on Mayberry, but did not open his lips during the walk. Mayberry carried the fatal fragment of rock in his hand.

"I say!" exclaimed Stilson, when the others were seated in front of him, "here's a new theory! Could it have been an aerolite?"

The geologist smiled faintly and looked at the fragment.

"No," he replied. "Dismiss that theory, Stilson."

"Is that a shooting star?" asked Robertson.

"Yes, but this piece of stone isn't."

"Well, then," declared Stilson, "accident and nature are out of it. It comes down to this, and we might as well look the thing squarely in the face. This was done by human agency. Now we are alone in this immense wilderness——"

"Are we?" interrupted Robertson. "I wasn't aware of it."

"I meant our party. I was simply coming to the Indians. Both of them had as much reason as any of us to hate Colburn. We have no business to be suspicious of each other. One or both of our red guides did the thing."

He paused impressively, and after a bit Robertson made an answer that was little short of extraordinary.

"No, sir," said he slowly, and in his usually respectful manner, "Mukwa and Gezhik are innocent. It was one of us three."

CHAPTER X.

ROBERTSON'S WAY OUT.

NOTHING could have brought the situation home more impressively to the two whom Robertson accused; for that was what his remark amounted to.

It was more effective in making each face the bald truth that he was under suspicion and that circumstantial evidence was against him than would have been the entrance of an officer with a warrant for his arrest.

The two were too shocked for a moment to make any response. Both stared at the woodsman, whose eyes were nearly closed, though they roved from one to the other steadily. It was only too plain that Robertson spoke from deep conviction.

Presently Stilson drew a long breath and assumed a bitter jocularity of manner.

"Well, Don," said he, "as you couldn't have limped out of the tent last night and back again without help, you're out of it, aren't you?"

"I am," Robertson replied seriously, "and I mean to keep out of it."

His voice vibrated with a significance that the others failed to understand.

"And yet," said Stilson, "it won't do to say that it was impossible for you to do it. Stranger things have happened, and, when it comes to motive, you had no more reason to love Colburn than we did."

"Aye, aye"—and Robertson struck his fist upon his knee—"that's the kind of talk that is possible anywhere when we get out of the woods. I never said Colburn had better be killed, I never opened my lips in violent threats against him, I had no jealousy of him. But it can be said that he made me mad, as he did. It can be said that I didn't like him, which is true. It can be said that I hired my Indian boys to do what I couldn't do.

"A great many things can be said, gentlemen, to put me in a bad light in this matter, and I don't mean that they shall be said. The sooner you two gentlemen understand that, the better it will be for both of you."

The threat implied in the woodsman's words was emphasized in his tone, but neither of the others understood him yet.

Said Mayberry: "This is the strangest situation imaginable. Here we three men sit, talking in the friendliest manner, although very seriously, and we are debating which of us is guilty of murder. I want to say for myself, without delay, that I do not share Robertson's view. I do not believe that it was one of us three, but——"

"Nor I," Stilson interrupted. "I stand by——"

"Pardon me, please; let me finish just this thought," and Mayberry addressed himself to Robertson. "You

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say the guilt lies with us, and you count yourself out of it very properly, because, in your own case, you know yourself to be innocent. Now let me suggest that, if your theory is correct, you cannot expect the guilty man to confess his crime. I shall count myself out of it—Stilson will do the same."

"Mr. Mayberry, sir, that was just what I was driving at. You can talk much better than I can, and you've said it for me."

"You can talk well enough, Robertson. Have no fear on that score, and you've got a good deal to say; a good deal that I insist on hearing. You have uttered some vague threats against us. I want to understand them."

"There's just one word wrong in what you say, Mr. Mayberry. 'Threats against us,' says you. That's not so. Threats, if you like, but not against both of you. I threaten only the guilty man, unless you're both guilty, which is quite possible."

Mayberry could not repress a start of surprise. It was not so much at the possibility suggested by the woodsman as at the fact that he, unlettered Donald Robertson, suggested it.

And it was said so calmly, dispassionately, almost as if the esteem in which he held the guilty man would not be modified by the fact of his guilt.

"Do explain yourself," said Mayberry in the same way.

"I'll try to, sir. Mr. Stilson says we're here alone in the woods, which may be so and it may not be so. I'm not sure, but, let that pass; we will imagine, sir, that we're out of the woods and that we take back to the settlements news that one of the party was killed by human hands during the trip. When that's said, you know better than I do what will happen. Questions will be asked that we will have to answer. The facts of the trip will have to be told; and they'll be told straight, sir, for whichever of you is innocent will agree with my story, for I shall tell the truth. I want to make it clear that the guilty man can't put up a story that isn't so."

"Unless we're both guilty," put in Stilson. "Then we might agree upon a yarn that would put Don Robertson in the hole."

"You're quite wrong, Mr. Stilson—quite wrong. You forget, or perhaps you don't know, that an Indian's word goes in the courts of Canada. Do I need say anything more on that point?"

"No, I guess you don't," said Stilson, with a glance at the red-skinned guides near the tents.

"Then," the woodsman went on, "I think you understand what Mr. Mayberry called my threats. If you're both guilty——"

"Oh, this is horrible!" exclaimed Mayberry, adding immediately, "But, go on. Better have it all out."

"Aye, much better. If you're both guilty, you can cook up any story you please; the evidence of one white man and two Indians, well known for their honesty, will be against you."

"That is to say," said Stilson, "you and the Indians will put up a yarn that will bring us both to the gallows."

"I don't go so far as to prophecy that," replied Robertson coolly. "I mean that the Indians and I will tell the facts as we know them, and I advise you young men to think a minute or two on what those facts will seem to show."

He paused, and Mayberry said, "Better tell us what you think they show, Robertson."

"I've told you that. I think they show that one or both of you is guilty."

"Reason it out, please."

"Well, take Mr. Stilson. He's rowed with Colburn from the time we started—aye, from before that. Colburn bullied him, insulted him, and tormented him so that, on more than one occasion, Mr. Stilson spoke of putting Mr. Colburn out of the way. That would sound bad when told in court. It would sound worse when I told of the row yesterday, after it was known that the grub was lost; how Colburn chased Stilson into camp, and Stilson sat beside me with a stone in his hand to use as a weapon.

"I've been to three or four murder trials, gentlemen, and I remember well what the lawyers said. They first tried to show that the prisoner had a motive for the crime. Then they showed that he had opportunity for it.

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There's more motive for Mr. Stilson in this case than in any of the cases I heard, and in each one of them, gentlemen, the prisoner was found guilty and was sent to the gallows."

Stilson's brow was glistening with sweat. He nestled about in intense discomfort. But, "Go on," said he hoarsely.

"The opportunity is too plain, gentlemen. I slept well last night. When Mr. Mayberry called at the tent I waked just enough to hear the voices, but I recognized them and dropped off to sleep again before I caught a word. Mr. Mayberry had explained how Colburn was sound asleep out there in the storm. What easier for Stilson, a little later, than to get up carefully, commit murder, and come back again? The weapon was already in his mind, and he knew that he was fairly safe, for suspicion would fall on Mr. Mayberry also, and, if that failed, he imagined that the deed could be shouldered off on the Indians."

"Stop!" cried Stilson, almost beside himself at this cool analysis. "I won't have it. I am innocent, so help me God! I won't be tortured——"

"Let him go on," urged Mayberry. "It's my turn, Robertson, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I think it is, because I have managed to show Mr. Stilson how his case would look in court. As for you, Mr. Mayberry, you bore Colburn's abuse better than Stilson did, but you lost your temper more than once, and any man, with half an eye, could see that you despised him. I think you hated Colburn more deeply than Mr. Stilson did, especially as you had a grouch against him that was different and deeper than any Mr. Stilson had. You knew that he'd got your girl away from you."

"What!" cried Mayberry, springing up.

"You see what it is to be roasted over a slow fire," muttered Stilson.

"He told me about it," said Robertson, with the same impenetrable calmness that had characterized his talk from the beginning. "It was during the first day's journey on the Pahquatasing river. Mr. Colburn was feeling fine that day and he talked most of the time. He talked about the expedition, what it was for, about the men in it; he gave me your histories, and said he felt sorry for Mr. Mayberry because the girl you loved had favored him. This would have to come out in court with the rest of it——"

Mayberry was much paler than he had yet been. He looked positively ill.

"Take it for granted," he interposed, "that you have established the motive in my case. Go on with the opportunity."

"The opportunity is too plain. You slept in the tent with him. By your own account you awoke with the rain beating on you. That wouldn't be calculated to make a man feel very pleasant. I think it would rouse all his mad. He'd think how Colburn was to blame for all the trouble that had come upon the expedition, and there was Colburn helpless within reach!

"No need to go into all that. The facts are too plain. But it might be well to consider the opportunity for both to plot the deed. It would be as easy for both as for one. There would be double the motive and a division of the risks, with the mistaken but natural idea on the part of both that the blame could be shouldered off on the red men, to say nothing of shunting it on Don Robertson.

"And when it came to court you'd both tell the facts that show motive on Don Robertson's part, and—I know what juries are, gentlemen—you might make some impression with your yarn."

"Then," said Stilson, for Mayberry was too overwhelmed to speak, "you admit that the case might look bad for you, too."

"I admitted that in the beginning, sir, and you'll remember I said I wouldn't let such things be said. I'm not looking for trouble. I'm going to avoid it. There's a way out of this that doesn't seem to have occurred to you gentlemen at all."

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" demanded Stilson.

"Simply leave out one part of the story we will have to tell. We've got to say that Mr. Colburn died on the trip, but we don't need to say that he was murdered."

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"Well, by Jove!"

The exclamation was Stilson's. Mayberry knitted his brows and stared at Robertson.

Quick-witted though he was, the geologist was not quite equal to grasping this solution of the difficulty at once.

"I will say that I can't believe I understand you," said Mayberry, after a pause, as if a question had been put to him.

"Seems to me it's easy," responded Robertson, as unperturbed as before. "Like enough we're alone here in the woods. I'm not sure, but, any way, there's neither prying reporters of newspapers nor officers of the law within hundreds of miles. There's nobody to say there was murder except ourselves.

"What's the good of saying it? I've nothing against you gentlemen, and I don't suppose you've got anything against me. Why should we get each other into trouble? It won't restore Mr. Colburn's life to convict anybody of killing him. No good will come of it. You gentlemen are not hardened criminals, so there's no danger to the rest of the world in letting you go free. We can say that Mr. Colburn died of an accident, and there will be nobody to deny it. Nobody will dream of asking suspicious questions."

The suggestion gave Stilson such a sense of relief that he actually laughed.

"I squirm at your reasoning, Don," said he, "but it goes. It gets there. I certainly don't see why we should boil hot water for ourselves. Let's let the matter drop. You seem willing to go on just as if it really was an accident, Don."

"I haven't said anything about going on," returned the woodsman cautiously. "I've been speaking about what will happen when we go back."

"But you say you've got nothing against us."

"Aye, but it don't follow that I'd care to travel with you further than back to Pahquatasing."

"This is a useless argument," said Mayberry suddenly. "I'll tell why after asking a question. You have hinted that we may not be alone in the woods. What do you mean by that?"

"Mean? Nothing at all, except that there may be others round about here. The brush is free. I seldom have made a journey without coming upon roving Indians. We haven't seen any yet, but that's no sign they're not near us now."

"Then," exclaimed Stilson, "there's another theory for the deed. An Indian who does not belong to the party——"

"Nay, nay! What motive would he have?"

"Robbery. He might think that Colburn carried the purse."

"Is there any sign that the victim's body was searched for valuables?"

Stilson staggered for a moment.

"But," said he, "we could suggest that in our account of what has happened. If it was a prowling redskin he would be the last to take to the settlements any account of the affair that would differ from ours."

Robertson had no opportunity to comment on this suggestion, for Mayberry spoke up decidedly.

"We've talked long enough on this strain. I think I understand the proposition now, and I reject it."

"Reject it!" echoed Stilson. "Why?"

"I shouldn't suppose it would be necessary to explain why. I have some sense of honor, some pride, and I don't mean to go from this wilderness with a suspicion of murder against me in the minds of any persons, no matter how few they are, and not try to discover the truth. I will not be a party to covering up this dreadful matter with a lie, be the consequences what they may."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I'm going at once," was the reply, "to write the necessary report to the syndicate. One of the Indians must take it to the nearest telegraph office."

CHAPTER XI.

STILSON'S NEW THEORY.

It was an occasion for Stilson to manifest his capacity for leadership. He knew it, and deep in his soul he knew that he was not equal to it.

For one instant he longed for the dead leader's domineering disposition.

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"Colburn would have cuffed everybody to his way of thinking," said Stilson silently, and with the very forming of the thought came a doubt as to whether anybody could cuff Mayberry in his present mood and not suffer for it.

There was unaffected determination in the geologist's mien that boded failure for any attempt to dissuade him from his course; and Stilson had just brains enough to perceive as much. So, "Don't do anything rash," was the best the new leader could offer.

"My ideas," responded Mayberry, "may be old-fashioned, but it seems to me it would be the height of rashness to attempt to conceal any portion of the facts. I think we should send a joint telegram, followed by a joint letter. I will prepare both and submit them to you."

"Well, that's better. As long as you don't go off at half-cock on your own hook we may be able to avoid a serious mistake."

Mayberry shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"I've said my say," Robertson remarked. "Whatever you gentlemen do, you can't say that I didn't tell you how I look at it."

"But what about sending an Indian," said Stilson doubtfully. "Here we've hardly provisions enough to last the day out. Whoever makes the trip must have grub. How can that be managed, Robertson?"

"That's the easiest part of it, sir. An Indian traveling on such an errand will sleep two hours out of the twenty-four and he will live on next to nothing. We can give the messenger all he'll need, and the rest of us will manage to take care of ourselves. Who do you think of sending?"

The question was addressed to Mayberry, who replied, "Mukwa seems to be the speedier of the two, and yet, as he's undoubtedly the cleverer, perhaps we ought to retain him here."

"Will you take my advice, gentlemen?"

"Certainly," said Mayberry, and Stilson nodded.

"Then send Gezhik. He's slow when there's no need of hurry, but he's got all the persistence of the ancient Indian, and that's what you need most. And perhaps you noticed that Gezhik didn't lose any time yesterday when the provision pack went down the rapids. He's your messenger, gentlemen."

A brief discussion followed as to the advisability of sending a message to Foster, the Pahquatasing storekeeper, with a request that he forward fresh supplies, and as to the possibility of getting them transported.

They remembered the difficulty there had been in getting men to go with the expedition, but Robertson was inclined to think that Foster himself would come out with the supplies for the sake of the trip and a view of new country.

"He's got a man to help at the store," said Robertson, "and I know from what he's told me that it wouldn't take much to induce him to make a run into the unknown bush. And any way, when he understands that we're short of rations, and in some danger, he'll hustle."

They talked this over as amicably as if there were no suspicion of murder in the air, and presently, when the Indians announced that breakfast was ready, the two persons most under suspicion helped the man who accused them back to the tents.

Breakfast was rather a thing of form than of substance that morning for all in the party. As soon as he had eaten the little that he believed to be necessary to sustain him, Mayberry withdrew to write his messages, and presently he called Stilson to vicé his telegram.

It was simply this:

"Colburn mysteriously killed. Letter follows."

"Well," said Stilson, "that's all right. That leaves the way open to an explanation of the kind that Robertson suggested."

"The letter won't leave any such way open."

"Are you wholly determined on that?"

"Wholly."

"But, see here, Mayberry; don't you fathom Robertson's policy. He's anything but the simple woodsman we supposed when we first met him."

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"Right. He has all the native shrewdness and power of reasoning that go with Indian blood. What he sees he sees with both eyes. As to his policy, I see nothing in it beyond what he openly expresses. Robertson is a singular mixture of common honesty and moral dullness. His sense of moral obligations hasn't been brought to a fine point."

"Nonsense! He has not only the power of reasoning that you say goes with his Indian blood, but he's got all the treachery of the traditional Indian, and don't you forget it. See here: Robertson is shielding Mukwa, or both of them. That's what he's doing. Now, I don't suppose for a moment that you are guilty."

"Thanks," said Mayberry dryly.

"I've noticed that you haven't denied the accusation."

"I don't intend to. When it's made directly against me I shall answer it. Meantime I shall do everything I can think of to clear up the mystery, and, if I succeed, nobody will accuse me."

"What can you do?"

"I don't know. I simply feel this: that here, where Colburn's death occurred, there is an explanation to be found. What it is, I don't profess to know."

"Can it be anything but murder?"

"I can only say that it looks more like murder than anything else."

"Then why not agree with me that it was the work of one or both the Indians?"

Mayberry knitted his brows in silence, and before he responded Stilson exclaimed:

"I see how it is! You suspect me. You believe I did it."

"No," said Mayberry, and yet, without any emphasis, "I don't believe that."

"Why can't you volunteer something, then, as I did, to show that you believed me innocent?"

"You seem to forget, Stilson, that, almost as soon as we knew that Colburn was dead, you were insinuating suspicions against me. I shall try not to let that influence what I do and think, but I can't forget it. Let me say frankly that I see only too clearly that the circumstances point straight to me. As long as that is the case I must work to find out the truth. We waste time in this sort of discussion. I am going to write a letter to Mr. Osborne. You'd better do the same and we'll send them together."

Stilson chafed inwardly but he yielded.

In his weak way he was conscious of his weakness. He had been ambitious to pose as leader of the expedition, and now, with nobody denying him the position, he found himself swayed this way and that by his subordinate.

In truth, he was not a little terrified by the black emergency that confronted him. He yielded, therefore, with comparative ease to Mayberry's quiet domination, because he felt the necessity of leaning upon somebody.

While the two were preparing their letters, Robertson talked long and earnestly with the Ojibways. The conversation was conducted wholly in their language, and though their voices never rose to a pitch suggestive of excitement, there was unmistakable bitterness in the tones.

This was especially the case with Robertson. Whereas his voice had been at a dispassionate dead level in his talk with the whites, now it twanged with feeling, while lips and eyes gave free expression to his argument, whatever it was.

The Indians listened with characteristic respect, and when they responded, sometimes at considerable length, their tones were deep, their faces grave, their gestures sweeping.

Sitting where he could see them while he wrote, Stilson was badly affected by all this. He desisted from his writing and went over to where Mayberry sat.

"Say," said he, "do you notice how those fellows are talking?"

"Yes," Mayberry answered. "They seem to be very much in earnest."

"I should say so! What do you suppose they're talking about?"

"The death of Colburn, of course."

"Well, yes; but doesn't it strike you that there may be something more in it? Confound it, Mayberry, I won't confess to being a coward, but I can't help remembering that we're two whites in this

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God-forsaken wilderness, surrounded, for anything we know, by treacherous redskins. Seems to me everything I've read of Indian massacres has been coming back to me this morning."

"I can't believe that we're in any danger," said Mayberry, but there was no indifference in his tone.

He, too, had been struck with the intense feeling manifested by Robertson and the Ojibways.

"You're lucky, then, or too trustful. I've got a new theory as to this thing, and it don't make me a bit comfortable. Will you hear it?"

"Go ahead."

"The Indians are after our money. I carry most of it and they know it. Now, whatever else you may say of Colburn, he was a fighter. They knew that if they killed and robbed me first, he would be after them and that he'd ransack the whole Canadian forest to catch them. So they got him out of the way first. Blamed if I don't believe it'll be my turn next, or yours, for they won't do things by halves. The traditional Indian never does."

Mayberry listened attentively, meantime watching Robertson and the Indians. He was again impressed with the singularity of the situation.

In his own heart he could not doubt Robertson's sincerity, and yet Stilson's view was reasonable, and it was impressive to reflect that those men, hardly a hundred feet distant, might be plotting his life and he none the wiser.

"The only thing we can do, Stilson," he responded, "is to be watchful."

"You think as I do, then."

"Not quite. I don't know what to think. The mystery deepens every minute, but I keep saying to myself that it was some sort of accident."

"You'll keep saying that to your destruction, if you don't look out."

Stilson was disappointed. He had hoped that Mayberry would emphatically condemn the new theory, and that he did not do so made Stilson the more confident of it, and by so much the more alarmed.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," he went on. "We must have food. I'll take the rifle and go on a hunt as soon as I get this letter done. That'll give me an excuse to keep the rifle with me. Have you got a revolver?"

"No."

"Colburn had one. You'd better get hold of it."

Mayberry nodded, as if he agreed, and they went at their writing again.

In a few minutes the letters were ready. Each read what the other had written.

Stilson briefly expressed his conviction that the expedition was threatened with hostile Indians, with whom the guides were in league. Mayberry frankly stated that all the evidence pointed to himself as a murderer, but held to his feeling that Colburn had met death as a result of accident.

A short letter was also written to Foster, asking him to send up supplies.

"I've told Gezhik," said Robertson, when they went to him with the letters, "that he must get to Pahquatasing as soon as possible. He understands just what he is to do, and in five days, at the most, he can be back."

Gezhik had already launched his canoe and put a scant supply of meat in his pocket. He took the letters and, without a word of farewell, set forth, his face wearing the customary smile.

Mukwa, pipe in mouth, stood with folded arms, watching him. Mayberry helped Robertson back to the tents, the woodsman complaining bitterly of his helplessness.

Stilson, rifle in the hollow of his arm, looked about him irresolutely. At length he went up to the Indian.

"Mukwa," said he, "we've got to have food."

"Yes," the Indian replied; "let me take the rifle and I'll get it for you."

"But I'm thinking of hunting myself. Where do you think I should go?"

The Indian's face was expressionless. What contempt he felt for the white man's ignorance can only be guessed. After a long pause he answered:

"If you stay here long enough you will see deer swimming across the lake."

"Which means, I suppose, that I might as well go one way as another."

"I think it won't make any difference."

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"But can't you suggest something? When you were here before didn't you see deer runways, or something of that sort?"

"I didn't camp here. Let me take the rifle and I'll bring in a deer or a caribou, or something before the day is over."

He actually held out his hand. Stilson drew back hastily.

"No," he said. "I'll do the shooting."

"Huh!" Mukwa retorted, "you don't dare."

"What's that?" and Stilson nerved himself for an attack.

"I'll tell you," said Mukwa. "I say what I think. You're afraid to let me take the rifle. You believe I killed him. You think I'd kill you. Now I'll tell you something more. You give me the rifle and let me go for game, or I'll leave."

"You don't mean it!"

"I say what I think."

Stilson's blood ran cold. The Indian's attitude, tones, words, the steady gaze of his eyes, all combined to strengthen the latest theory concerning the tragedy.

The white man wondered a little at the nerve of the Indian in demanding the rifle.

"Why should you leave?" Stilson asked.

"You think I like to stay and be thought a murderer? Huh! If I stay I want food. You won't get any. Are you going to give me the rifle?"

"No, I am not."

"Then you've seen the last of me."

With this, Mukwa turned on his heel and walked away, pausing as he was about to enter the forest to add, "When Robertson gets well he will need my canoe. He can use it and he will bring it back to me."

Then he was gone before Stilson could recover from his amazement.

CHAPTER XII.

A BIG SURPRISE.

"WHAT do you think now?" said Stilson, a moment later, striding up to the tents. "Mukwa has cleared out. If that isn't good evidence of his guilt, I'd like to know what is."

"Mukwa gone?" queried Robertson.

"Yes. He had the nerve to ask for my rifle. I wouldn't let him have it and he skipped. Said it was the last I'd see of him."

"Then it is."

"Is what?"

"The last you'll see of him. I feared it. These Indians are no fools, Mr. Stilson. They saw that you suspected them and they didn't like it."

"Well, I suppose they say I'm guilty, don't they?" blurted Stilson in an aggrieved tone.

"Yes, sir," replied Robertson calmly, "that's just what they say."

"And they let Mayberry out of it?"

"They do."

"Mayberry, you're to be congratulated. I'm glad the beggar's gone. One less mouth to feed, one less traitor in camp."

"And the only hunter gone," added Robertson. "Well, I can go without food for two days. I've done it before. By then I'll be able to get about."

"You needn't be so anxious," retorted Stilson. "I've never shot big game, but if there is any to be had in these woods I'll get it. Mukwa wouldn't give me a pointer as to where to go. If you can, Don, you'd better."

"I never was here before, sir. The only advice I can give is that you blaze your trail."

"Eh?"

"We've got no Indian to hunt for you now if you get lost."

"I'll look out for that," said Stilson confidently, and away he started, going in the direction opposite to that taken by Mukwa.

Mayberry had been talking with Robertson about another necessary and gruesome feature of the situation—the disposition of Colburn's body. The possibility of taking it back to civilization was not discussed.

Mayberry shrank from an immediate burial, but, as Robertson said, "the ways of town life are not the ways of the bush," and he furthermore pointed out the entire probability that self-defence would soon require Mayberry to exert himself without interruption.

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"I've little faith," said Robertson, "that your friend Stilson will be able to supply us with food. By the time you have to try for it you must have all other duties out of the way. There is only one thing to do, and that is to bury the body as quickly as possible."

"And as decently as possible," put in Mayberry.

"Aye, but you can't dig a deep grave. You've naught to dig with except your knife."

At the very edge of the flat expanse of rock on which Colburn had pitched his tent was a small area of broken stone. It was there that he and the Indians had procured the stones with which his guy ropes had been weighted. Mayberry made a suggestion with this spot in view, to which Robertson assented, and accordingly he worked all the forenoon clearing a narrow space and piling the stones up on both sides of it.

He insisted that Robertson should look on while he searched Colburn's clothing for such articles as ought to be preserved.

There was a little money, pipe and tobacco, a knife, watch, revolver, and a number of letters. Among the latter Mayberry recognized the one addressed in Rose Osborne's hand that had been received in Pahquatasing.

His heart beat strangely hard when he saw it again, but he laid it with the others and included all the articles except the revolver in one bundle.

"We'll take these things back and send them to his people," said Mayberry, "if we can find who and where they are. At that time I will include the revolver. For the present I think I'd better keep it, as I have none of my own."

"Aye," said Robertson, "that's right. You ought to have somebody to help you now."

There was nobody to help and Mayberry carried the body to the place of little stones, laying it upon the section of ledge that he had made bare. Then he cut many branches from the bushes roundabout and covered the remains with great care.

All the afternoon he was at work piling the stones over the dead leader, anxious not only that the tomb should be secure from disturbance by wild beasts, but that it should manifest regard for decency in its appearance.

Robertson had declined to eat at noon, and Mayberry had limited his refreshment to a spoonful of condensed milk stirred into a cup of water. At the end of his solemn labor he was faint with hunger and the unusual exercise.

"You've a right to anything there is, sir," said Robertson. "I'm doing nothing and can stand it. Besides, I'm used to it."

"Stilson may bring in something soon."

"Don't depend on it. If he does, then his supper is taken care of and you can have more. You must take a mouthful or two, sir."

"There's just about enough cold meat left to give each of us three half a lunch. I'll take one-third, and I won't eat again till we have fresh food."

Mayberry offered Robertson his share, but the woodsman again declined, saying that he would wait till morning.

"I'll take steak from the caribou that Stilson is going to bring in," said he, with a grim smile.

Perhaps Robertson thought that Stilson would not come upon any game. Certain it is that he would not have done so if success depended on his knowledge of their haunts and habits.

He walked the forest for two hours without hearing anything more promising than the chatter of squirrels and chipmunks.

He would not waste his powder on them, but looked hopefully for the tracks or spoor of larger animals. Meantime he kept discreetly near the river, for he had taken seriously Robertson's warning about getting lost.

It was along toward noon that some odd freak of fortune brought him within thirty yards of a red deer. Stilson could not have said whether it was deer or caribou, but he knew that it was not a moose and that it would provide the party against starvation for many days.

He had halted, as he had often done before, to look around and listen. Nothing was to be seen beyond the interminable forest, nothing heard save

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its rustling and the ripple of the river near.

For five minutes or more he had stood motionless, almost minded to return to camp and take his share of what there might be left there to eat.

Then came the deer, a sizable beast with antlers.

Where he was going, where he came from, what possessed him to walk straight into a man with a gun, are no concern of ours. Neither was it any concern of Stilson's to ask why, as to the amiable beast's wandering.

He was not at all disposed to do so, but, on the contrary, made ready to receive Mr. Deer with cordiality.

What little breeze there was blew from the deer toward the man. Stilson wot not of this, but he did perceive that the animal was coming directly at him, quite as if he recognized that it was necessary that his life should be sacrificed to human need.

So Stilson held his breath and waited till there could be no possible question of his hitting the target.

He kept his rifle half raised, and his imagination leaped forward to the time when he should throw the deer down in front of the skeptical Robertson. Presently he raised the hammer, and the deer, probably hearing the faint click, stopped at once and looked at him.

Until then the beast evidently had not seen the man. There it stood, waiting to be shot, as one might say, across the street. Hunter never had better opportunity.

Stilson looked along the barrel and his heart grew sick. He saw not one barrel but several, and they were pointing in as many different ways.

Reason told him that there was only one barrel, but it also told him that he must speedily differentiate that one from the several imitations and hold it steady if he hoped for venison.

Strenuously he tried to control his trembling arms, but in vain. The rifle kept on vibrating, while the deer sniffed at him in an interested way.

How long this agony endured he had no means of knowing, and he never found out, but at last the deer came to the conclusion that his course lay in another direction, and he trotted gracefully away, presenting a clean-cut side target as he turned.

Stilson, or, perhaps, it was fate, pulled the trigger.

Ah! What a speed the deer developed then! Like a flash of light in the gloom of the forest it darted away, untouched, but alarmed enough to run miles without stopping.

The mortified hunter tried to get in another shot. The mind, acting with comprehensive swiftness, which is a way minds have under such circumstances, saw an immediate abatement of the "buck fever" and a perfectly steady hand thenceforth; but, alas, before the hands could get ready for a second shot there was no target.

Stilson threw the rifle upon the ground and cursed himself and the situation with great fervency.

It was dusk when he returned to camp. Even the chipmunks had avoided him on the way back.

"I'm nearly dead," said he. "Is there anything left? No, I saw no game whatever. I presume an Indian might have found some, but I didn't."

Not till long afterward did he confess to the loss of a remarkable opportunity to supply the camp, and at this time his companions felt sincere pity for him. He was so worn, so evidently exhausted both physically and mentally. Mayberry hastened to give him the share that belonged to him, and when the geologist was absent for a moment, Robertson gave him the rest.

It should be said to Stilson's credit that he did not know that he was eating the last morsel in the stock excepting the condensed milk.

Before sunrise the next morning Mayberry arose without waking the others and went down through the woods to the foot of the rapids, where he cut and trimmed a light pole.

To this he fastened probably the most original fish-line ever made. It consisted of a shirt cut into strips and tied together.

He had not found so much as one pin in the entire outfit at camp. There had been a paper, he was sure, and that probably had been mixed up with the provision pack and so lost. But Mayberry

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was somewhat of a Yankee, and, while waiting for Stilson to come in the evening before, he had fashioned an apology for a hook out of the cover of a corned-beef can.

This he baited, or, rather, disguised with a fragment of flannel shirt that he hoped would impress a fish as a new and inviting kind of gaudy insect.

"I can only hope," he thought, "that the fish of this neighborhood are as hungry as I am, and that they are uncommonly ignorant."

Sheepishly he cast his ridiculous line toward what his experienced eye knew to be a promising pool. He could hardly refrain from a glance around to see whether anybody were looking, and if a deer had strolled curiously up, it is ten to one that he would have been too ashamed to continue.

To his unutterable amazement, to say nothing of excitement, the rag had no sooner touched the water than a fish rose to it.

This was no occasion for sportsmanlike dallying with the game. If there ever was an artless pot hunter it was J. Howard Mayberry, geologist, at that moment. It was simply a question of getting that fish to land by hook or by —main strength—or any old way, and the pole cut a swath in the air sidewise like a flail.

Wonder of wonders, the fish followed it! Of course it had let go the absurd hook, which by no possibility could have penetrated the flesh.

Mayberry had hoped that luck might make it slip through the gills, but no matter; the fish had gulped hard and the yank had been synchronous, so that now the fish was dropping, and it did look as if he would drop back again into the stream.

Mayberry dropped the pole and jumped. He struck the mossy bank at just about the time the fish did and fell upon him with fierce enthusiasm.

The man stumbled and slipped and the fish flopped and wriggled. One foot of the man dipped into the stream, but the fish had no such luck.

A pair of hands that no slime could elude gripped that misguided fish and would have held on even if the whole of the man had slid into the water.

On his knees and elbows Mayberry edged away from the brink until he felt that he could rise with safety. Then he ran not less than a hundred feet into the forest before he dared stop to cut a twig and hang his prize upon it.

A prize indeed! He looked upon it with such joy that he all but cried over it. What he had caught, or buncoed might be the better word, was a speckled trout of not less that two pounds.

That he tried again might go without saying. Two pounds of fresh trout will do very well for a breakfast for three starving men, but the early morning is the time for the pot hunter and the hunger of later hours had to be considered.

It will not do to detail his adventures. There was no difficulty in getting a rise from pool after pool, but in few instances did his clumsy hook suffice to bring the victim landward.

In every instance where that did happen it was a race like the first to see whether the greedy man could pounce on the trout before it had flopped back into the stream.

After an hour or so he had a string of five good specimens, and with this he went back to camp, arriving before the others had crawled out, though both were awake.

Robertson grinned all over his face at the sight, and Stilson manifested more light-heartedness than at any time since the expedition started from New York.

"Why didn't you say you were going fishing?" he cried; "I'd have had a fire ready."

He ran to the tripod that the Indians had set up with a view to cooking that not yet had been done for lack of things to cook, and stopped short, both hands thrown involuntarily aloft.

"For Heaven's sake!" he gasped, and turned around excitedly. "Come here, Mayberry! What do you make of this?"

Mayberry went to the spot, and he, too, gasped his surprise.

Lying on the rocks beside the fireplace were several freshly caught trout, a bag of flour, a big hunk of venison, a tin of coffee, a parcel of bacon, and several other edible articles that made his famished mouth water.

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The first wild thought that occurred to him was that all this was a part of the stock that had been lost in the river—he overlooked the venison—and that, somehow, it had been recovered and brought back.

"It can't be our stuff," he said vacantly, stooping to examine the wrappers. "This wasn't the brand of coffee we carried——"

"Good Lord!" interrupted Stilson, "it's ours now, isn't it? You're not going to decline to eat it, are you? Why, man alive, it's manna, that's what it is, manna in the wilderness!"

He fairly whooped in his joy. Robertson hobbled out unaided to see what was the matter. He scratched his head and grinned with delight.

"Well now," said he, "that was worth waiting for. You didn't find that along the banks of the river below, did you, sir?"

"I find it?" cried Mayberry. "Stilson found it. Haven't you any idea where it came from?"

"Oh, yes, that's easy. There's a *cache* somewhere round here, and it's been opened for our benefit."

"A *cache!* Then white men have been here before us."

"Not necessarily."

"But who could have opened it and brought the stuff here?"

"Well, sir, I should guess it was Mukwa, but I don't know. I'm as surprised as you are, and I think I'm hungrier. If you gentlemen will bring up some wood, I think I can help a bit about the fire."

He looked around as he spoke and then suddenly pointed out to the lake.

"And what do you make of that?" he asked.

Following the direction of his gesture they saw three canoes approaching.

Mayberry's heart gave a great bound, for the canoes were so near that he recognized their occupants. Among them was Miss Rose Osborne.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROSE OSBORNE'S VIEW OF IT.

THE geologist felt dizzy for a moment. He was faint with hunger, and the excitement of finding a mysterious supply of food had further exhausted him. The added bewilderment of this vision made it all seem like a dream.

He went with Stilson down to the margin of the lake, and Robertson stumped along after them. The parties in the canoes saw them and turned promptly to shore.

"By Jove," exclaimed Stilson, who had not before recognized the newcomers, "it's Mr. Osborne! This way, sir! Here's your best place for landing."

With one exception Indians were at the paddles, the exception being Mr. J. Foster, of the Pahquatasing general store.

Each canoe carried a passenger. In the first was Mr. Osborne. His son Harry was in the next, and in the last sat Miss Rose. She waved her hand and called cheerily:

"How do you do, Mr. Mayberry? Aren't you going to ask us to breakfast?"

"Don't mind her, Mr. Mayberry," shouted Harry; "we've had breakfast and Rose ate more'n all the Indians together."

Whereupon Miss Rose said "Harry!" reprovingly, and the boy insisted that it was "so, any way."

A terrible embarrassment came upon the geologist.

The explanation of this utterly unexpected visitation would soon be made, and that troubled him not at all. They were here, would soon be on shore, and that was the worst of it.

A flood of emotions, badly mixed, was upon him. How easy it would have been to respond to their jolly salutations if Colburn were alive! What a terrible shock was in store for her! How could he soften it? How prepare her for it? Had not Gezhik met——

Mr. Osborne was speaking.

"We expected," he said, "to catch up with you by night. The Indians had no idea you would go into camp here. We took a tremendously early start, you see, thinking we should have a long journey before finding you. I suppose our camp, last night, couldn't have been more than two miles away. We would have come further if we'd known."

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"Yes," Rose added, "I think you ought to have telephoned."

"How are things?" asked Foster genially, but there was no need of attempting to answer just then, for the paddlers deftly brought the canoes alongside the landing-place and the passengers began to get out.

Mayberry gave his hand to Mr. Osborne, leaving to Stilson the privilege of helping Rose. Harry, as a matter of course, clambered out unaided and nearly upset his canoe in so doing.

"We camped here," said Mayberry hurriedly to the capitalist, "because our head guide met with an accident and couldn't travel. He's nearly well, now."

"I'm almost glad for the accident," responded Mr. Osborne, "for I've been bamboozled and bullied and wheedled into getting several degrees further into the wilderness than I had any intention of getting when we left New York. We got your letter explaining your necessary delay at Pahquatasing, and telegraphed you to wait a bit longer for us, as Harry was eager to join the expedition. But it seems you had got a day away when the telegram arrived. So there was nothing to do but organize an expedition of our own and follow your trail."

During this explanation Miss Rose had effected a landing. She was piqued that Mayberry had not run to greet her, and this may have been partly responsible for the first question she asked.

"What makes you men so fearfully solemn?" was the query. "You look as if camp life didn't agree with you."

To this Stilson replied, with more tact than Mayberry would have expected from him:

"We're hungry, Miss Osborne. Our breakfast is not even started yet."

"What laggards!" she cried, and then advanced to Mayberry, holding out her hand.

"I hope you'll condescend at least to shake hands with me," she said demurely. "Where's Mr. Colburn?"

"He's not here at present," replied Mayberry, barely touching her hand.

His heart stood still as he wondered if she would jump to the conclusion that he had murdered her favored lover!

Her surprise at his coldness was not well masked.

"I shall be very glad to see him," said she, in which was the direct implication that she observed that Mayberry was not glad to see her.

Indeed, he was not. He never regretted the sight of anybody so much as he did that of the young woman for whom he would gladly have laid down his life.

The immediate embarrassment was relieved by Harry, who was clamoring for a chance to shake hands with his teacher.

"I was just bound I'd join you, sir," said he. "Pop and Rose never meant to go beyond Pahquatasing, but Rose was on my side when we got there and found you'd been gone less than a day and a half. There was a jolly lot of Indians there, and so we made up a party in a hurry. Where are your Indians?"

This gave Mayberry his opportunity to lead away from the gay talk to that of appalling seriousness, which could not forever be postponed. He managed to give his pupil a smile, and answered: "You ought to have met one of our Indians. We sent him back early yesterday morning with a message for your father."

"We've met nobody," said Mr. Osborne, to whom Mayberry turned inquiringly.

"Then he must have taken another trail. It's a matter of very great importance, Mr. Osborne. I must ask you to give it your attention at once."

"Certainly," was the wondering response. "Rose, you and Harry can inspect the camp for a few minutes. I've got to talk business with Mr. Mayberry."

"And Mr. Stilson," added the geologist.

Stilson joined them hastily. He was in a torment of doubt as to what to say to the young lady. Robertson had hobbled back and was making the fire.

Mayberry led the other two to the spot where the woodsman had announced his convictions as to the cause of Colburn's death.

"Isn't Mr. Colburn to join in the discussion?" added the capitalist.

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"Unfortunately, no," replied Mayberry. "Do you see that little pile of stones?"

He pointed to the rude mausoleum which was but a few yards from them.

"Mr. Colburn," he added, without waiting for a reply, "is under there."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne. "Dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, this is shocking—dreadful! How did it happen? He seemed such a robust man, and inured to the hardships of camp life."

"He was a robust man, Mr. Osborne —the strongest in the party. What brought about his death is more than I can say, except that I have the implement with which it was done. I will show it to you presently. If you should ask that man up there who is at work over the fire, he would tell you with his rugged honesty that Mr. Colburn was killed by myself or Stilson, or both of us."

Mr. Osborne was too startled to respond.

"Our Indians believe us guilty," continued Mayberry desperately, "and one of them deserted us on that account. The other we sent with a message to you."

"All this is simply incredible," said Mr. Osborne.

"But it's true," put in Stilson, who took courage from Mayberry's wholesale statement of the distressing facts. "Mr. Mayberry has merely eased up on my part of it. I understand that the Indians think I did it. I believe they were guilty, one or both of them——"

"Let me have the facts from the beginning."

They told him, Mayberry taking the burden of the narration, mincing matters not at all, showing how each of them had lost his temper with Colburn, how Colburn's blunders had delayed progress and finally brought the party to the verge of starvation.

"And not the least mysterious part of it," Mayberry concluded, "is that, this morning, when, as we supposed, we had nothing to eat except some fish that I caught, we found a considerable supply of provisions—flour, tinned goods and venison —near our fireplace."

Mr. Osborne's eyes lighted a bit at this last item in the account, but they were grave again instantly, and he turned them towards the tents where his son and daughter were talking with Robertson.

Foster also stood by. Mayberry was extremely apprehensive as to what might be the result of the conversation there, and yet "the disclosure cannot long be delayed," he thought.

"This is a strange trick of fate," said Mr. Osborne. "My daughter——" here he broke off abruptly, glancing in a troubled way at Stilson, and then went on: "As to your mysterious supply of food, I think I can account for it."

"It came from your stock?" asked Stilson.

"Probably. While we were at breakfast Mr. Foster spoke to me about a matter that the Indians had reported to him earlier in the morning. It seems that some time in the night one of our guides was awakened by a strange Indian, who asked him to leave the camp for a few minutes. Our Indian did so, finding that he knew the visitor, who explained that he and some friends had lost their provisions and were in danger of serious suffering. He wanted to know if we could spare some of ours."

"That must have been Mukwa," said Mayberry.

"One of your Indians? I didn't learn his name, but I was struck with his honesty. He could have stolen what he wanted with no difficulty whatever. He told our man that he had no money to buy with, but that he would pledge his canoe for what it was worth, and our man promptly and properly accommodated him. Later he reported the matter to Foster, who told me. We were glad to be of service to anybody in difficulty, but we supposed it was a party of Indians who were in need. We never dreamed that it was you."

A pause followed, filled with agony for Mayberry.

"This is a dreadful affair," said Mr. Osborne presently. "You gentlemen must be nearly dead with hunger and you must go to breakfast. I think your cook is ready for you. I must manage somehow to tell my daughter what has happened."

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They arose and started slowly toward the tents. Almost at the same moment Miss Rose gave a startled cry and hurried toward them.

"Father! Mr. Mayberry!" she cried. "Is it true? What has happened? What does the backwoodsman mean? Where is Mr. Colburn?"

Mayberry unconsciously bared his head and looked at the ground. He could not meet her eyes.

"Rose," said her father, "Mr. Colburn is dead. He was killed mysteriously. I will tell you what I can about it."

"Dead! Killed!" she echoed, aghast, and Mayberry, looking still at the ground, did not see the impulsive start she made towards him.

He did not see that her father took her gently by the arm and led her back to the spot where he himself had learned of the tragedy, did not see that she kept looking at him over her shoulder, her eyes filled with wonderment, anxiety, and a sentiment that seemed very like compassion.

Stilson put his hand on Mayberry's shoulder.

"Come, old man," said he, "the worst is over."

"No," groaned Mayberry, "there is worse to follow. What will she say to the circumstantial evidence? What can she think?"

"Trust the woman in her," Stilson responded gravely, "not to see what you know to be false."

Mayberry was profoundly surprised. He would not have looked to Stilson for any such delicacy of feeling.

Impulsively he put out his hand and Stilson grasped it firmly.

"I think we understand each other better," said Mayberry. "If it will comfort you at all, you may know that I do not believe that you had anything to do with Colburn's death."

"I'm glad enough to have you say that flat-footed," returned Stilson bitterly, "but Miss Osborne won't say so. She'll think I did it. Meantime, I'm convinced that the murderer is on his way to Pahquatasing with letters."

"Gezhik?" and Mayberry smiled faintly. "You've made the rounds of possibilities, haven't you, Stilson? I'm afraid we shall never know which of your guesses is correct."

Stilson shrugged his shoulders and they went on to the camp-fire, where Robertson was busy satisfying his long hunger.

"You gentlemen stand starvation pretty well," said he. "Grub has been ready for you these ten minutes."

"Why couldn't you have kept back the facts from that young lady?" Mayberry demanded, as he helped himself to coffee and biscuit.

"Keep 'em back!" exclaimed the woodsman. "I tried my best, but what with Foster hinting around and guessing at the truth like the Yankee that he is, and what with the young lady's questions, I didn't know what to do. I couldn't lie in two different ways at the same time. Besides, she had to know."

Mayberry said nothing further on the matter, for, from his habitual point of view, it would have been a waste of breath, and Stilson was altogether too engrossed with his meal to talk. Foster strolled up and looked at them a moment in silence.

"Be'n having trouble, hey?" he ventured.

Mayberry nodded.

"Colburn got killed, hey? Murdered?"

"Ask Robertson."

"Oh, I've asked him. I know what Don thinks," and the keeper of the general store strolled away again, joining the Indians at the shore.

Stilson and Mayberry exchanged glances.

"You've begun your campaign, I see," Stilson remarked.

"There's no complaint due from you, gentlemen," Robertson retorted sullenly. "I told you I wouldn't have certain things said if I could help it. I won't have Don Robertson or his red friends under suspicion of this crime. You've brought it on yourselves. If you'd agreed to say accident, or fever, or a fight with a mad moose, I'd have stood by ye. As it is, you'll have to clear yourselves if you can."

Stilson looked angry, but Mayberry was unmoved. His eyes and thoughts were on the group—father, son and daughter—near the rude mausoleum.

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"How her heart must ache!" he was thinking. "Not knowing Colburn as we did, she idealizes him, sees only the best side of him, loves that, and suffers now the worst of tragedies—a broken heart."

Father and son arose and came to the fire-place.

"Mr. Mayberry," said the elder, "when you have finished breakfast will you speak to my daughter?"

"At once, sir," and Mayberry went down across the expanse of flat rock much as a condemned man marches to the scaffold.

There were tears in her eyes when she looked up at him, and his heart bled for her.

"Mr. Mayberry," she said, "how can you take food with that dreadful man who accuses you?"

The question was the farthest possible removed from what he had anticipated; so far that he could not quickly discern the feeling that lay behind it. All he caught at the moment was a rebuke.

"Miss Osborne," he responded, "this expedition has brought about strange companionships. The man who accuses me is perfectly sincere——"

"I don't believe it!"

Then he looked at her with something like an apprehension of her attitude.

"Is it possible," he stammered, "that you have no suspicion of me? Has your father told you all the dreadfully suggestive facts?"

"He has told me all he knows. Sit down, please, Mr. Mayberry. Don't stand as if I were a judge. How can you think that you would have anything to fear from me? I want to tell you something."

"I cannot say," he said, as he seated himself on the stone in front of her, to which she pointed, "how great a weight you have lifted from me."

"Wait," said she. "It is my turn to speak, and it will not be easy; but, under these dreadful circumstances, duty compels me to volunteer what, under other circumstances, it would be my duty to withhold until asked for."

She hesitated, and a rosy color mounted to her brow.

"Did you receive a letter from me?" she asked.

"Yes, at Pahquatasing, shortly before we started."

"I wrote one also to Mr. Colburn."

"He received it. I can get it for you if you like. I found it yesterday among his effects."

"You have not read it?"

"Oh, no, no! I recognized the handwriting. The letter made him very happy at the time it came."

"Indeed!" and Miss Osborne seemed too surprised for a moment to speak; but she added presently: "I cannot see why it should have had that result. Mr. Mayberry, he had asked me the same question that you did. I wrote to him exactly as I did to you—word for word—with one exception. Some freak in my nature—call it womanish whim if you like—certainly it was unworthy of a sincere woman, led me to say in my letter to him that I would not say yes to any other until he had had his opportunity to renew the question after his return. Why I did not say as much in the letter to you I cannot understand, except—except——" here she looked down at the ground, "that I wanted to say yes to you unequivocally."

The words were hardly audible, but Mayberry heard them.

"Miss Osborne! Rose!" he whispered eagerly.

"I haven't quite finished," she interposed hastily. "As soon as those letters were beyond recall I regretted them bitterly. I knew then that I ought to have written plainly to each; 'no' to one, 'yes' to the other. I was very unhappy about it.

"Then my brother took it into his head that he would like to join the expedition, and father regretted that Harry had not spoken sooner, for, with you along, he knew that the experience would be fine for the boy. Father learned of your unavoidable delay at Pahquatasing, and Harry learned of it, too. Harry teased and I joined forces with him.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Mayberry, and I wanted to see Mr. Colburn. I thought that if we all met at Pahquatasing the problem of our lives that I had tangled so wilfully might be solved.

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I confided my trouble to my father. The result was a telegram asking you all to postpone departure till our arrival. When we found you had gone on, Harry and I insisted on pursuit, knowing that you would pause somewhere for prospecting and that thus we would be able to catch up with you.

"So, here we are, and I am glad that we came. I am grieved, as any friend should be, over Mr. Colburn's death, but I fear that that sentiment is wholly overshadowed by my sympathy for you. Ah, how this suspicion, so cruel and wicked, must have made you suffer!"

They were in plain sight of all, and, indeed, all eyes were, at the moment, directed toward them, but not because anybody save Mr. Osborne suspected that a declaration of love was in progress.

Another reason had arisen to set them all looking toward Mayberry, and he, unconscious of it, merely realized that this was no time and place for that exchange of words and tokens that would have been normal and irrepressible under other conditions.

He was telling her as best he could in a low, choking voice, how much her confession and support meant to him, when they were interrupted by Mr Osborne.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE BEAR GOT HIS HONEY.

"Excuse me, Mayberry," said Rose's father, "there's a red man here asking for you. I presume you'd better see him at once. It may be something of importance to us all. He won't say anything to the rest of us."

Mayberry turned and looked toward the camp.

He saw an Indian whose garments of fringed buckskin suggested the aboriginal savage, inexpressibly dirty though they were, and topped off with a ludicrously shabby derby hat. He had a rifle in the hollow of his arm and was coming slowly across the rock.

"Do you want to see me?" asked Mayberry, approaching the man.

"Uh! You Mayb'y?"

"Yes, Mayberry is my name. What is yours?"

"Me Wabeeno. You like-um know how your friend gettum dead?"

"Yes, indeed, Wabeeno. Tell me!"

The Indian jerked elbow and head in the direction of the forest.

"Come," said he.

Mayberry promptly complied and they started together toward the trees. Mr. Osborne ran after them.

"Are you going to be gone long?" he asked anxiously.

"How is that, Wabeeno?" said Mayberry. "Will it take a long time?"

"Yes."

"Will you let this gentleman come with us?"

"No. You 'lone."

"But he wants to know all this as much as I do."

"You tell-um."

Mayberry turned to Mr. Osborne, saying, "He has, or thinks he has, information about this matter. I shall have to go alone. When an Indian says 'no,' that settles it."

"Yes," added Wabeeno tranquilly.

"I am afraid we ought not to let you go," said Mr. Osborne. "We shall be horribly anxious. Has my daughter explained herself fully?"

"Thank God! Yes, sir. I would not needlessly risk her future happiness and mine, but she herself would say better such risk as there is than this horrible uncertainty."

Miss Rose had come up to them.

"I can't overcome a suspicion of these fellows," said her father in a whisper. "They are so treacherous, Mayberry. He may be leading you into an ambush."

"I think you are mistaken as to Indian character, sir; but what do you say?" and he briefly explained the situation to Miss Rose.

She looked startled and doubtful for an instant. Then she stepped up to the Indian.

"You will take care of my friend, will you not?" she asked.

"Uh," he grunted, and, tapping his rifle barrel, "heap bears. Kill-um. Him no gettum hurt."

"You must go with him," she said firmly to Mayberry, and, with a bow of assent, he fell in beside Wabeeno. They presently disappeared among the trees.

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Wabeeno led him, without a word, for some half mile into the forest. They came at length to a bark lodge, built partly against a cliff. Seated before the door, pipe in his mouth, was Mukwa.

"I'm glad to see you," said Mayberry, suppressing the slight surprise he felt, and he offered his hand.

Mukwa took it, and responded, "I say what I think. You have not said that I killed Colburn."

"No, I have not."

"And you no said Gezhik killed him."

"I have not said so; I have not thought so."

"Uh; it is good. I tell you now what I did think. Your friend Stilson, he kill-um."

"I am sure you're wrong, Mukwa."

"I know it, but I thought so. We all wrong, unless mebbe you. Robertson wrong, Stilson wrong, Gezhik and me wrong. I know now. What you think when I go away?"

"I never expected to see you again."

"Uh; I go for food. You get-tum?"

"Yes, thank you. This morning."

"I know Wabeeno, my friend here; he live somewhere round and I hunt for him. He give me venison and trout. Then I gettum tinned stuff from other travelers. You see-um?"

"They are at our camp now."

"Well, Wabeeno, he great hunter and trapper. You want to know what kill Colburn?"

"Of course I do, Mukwa, and all the others do."

"Don't care for others. Stilson mean man. He thinkum I done it. No show him."

"But there's a traveler who came this morning who needs to know as much as I do. And his daughter is with him, Mukwa. She want's to know, too. You saw her, Wabeeno."

"Uh," assented Wabeeno; "heep fine lady."

He spoke to Mukwa in their own language, Mukwa listening with apparent stolidity. At length, some time after Wabeeno had ceased speaking, he asked, "Who is this traveler?"

"He is my boss," replied Mayberry; "he was Colburn's boss, too, and, of course, he wants to know. I'd rather have you tell him than tell him myself."

"I no tell anybody," said Mukwa, and Mayberry's heart sank. "You bring your boss here and I show-um."

"All right. Shall we come to this spot?"

"No, I show you."

Mukwa arose and led the way back through the forest until they were about three hundred yards from the camp. Then he sat upon the ground and said, "Here."

Wabeeno had accompanied them and he, too, sat down.

Mayberry, looking around to get his bearings, saw that nearby was a ledge with a considerable outcropping of quartz that rose in one spot sheer to a height of about thirty feet. Thinking how such a ledge might be worth studying, with the expedition's purpose in view, he hastened back to the camp and apprised Mr. Osborne of what had happened.

"I have no idea," said Mayberry, "what the Indians will do, but I have abundant faith that it will prove final. I want other eyes than mine to see the proof."

"That is right," responded the capitalist; "I will go with you gladly. Had we better take lunch along?"

"Yes. I didn't ask again how long it will take, but I understand the Indians a bit now, and have learned that they mean what they say. We may be gone for hours."

They supplied themselves with provisions, declining, meantime, to answer the inquisitive Foster's questions, and hurried back to the ledge, where Mayberry introduced Mr. Osborne to the Indians.

After the handshaking, Mukwa had them go to the base of the ledge, where he halted, and pointed up.

"Could you climb up there?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I could, if it was necessary," Mayberry replied. "There are so many little projections from the surface, like so many handles——"

"Uh! You see-um. Good. Now watch."

He nodded to Wabeeno, who promptly began to climb a sapling that grew some twenty feet forward of the ledge. There were no larger trees be-

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tween it and the little cliff, and in the other direction—that is, toward the camp—there was a considerable space occupied by young growth only.

The sapling began to sway and bend when Wabeeno was half way to the top. He shinned a little higher and then laid hold of the slender trunk with both hands and let go with his feet. The tree bent over toward the ledge and the Indian worked his way along nearer to the top by shifting his hands an inch at a time. At last his feet touched the ground, whereupon Mukwa stepped forward and added his weight to prevent the tree from springing up again.

"When Wabeeno work alone," said Mukwa, "he use cords and take more time. I help now to show you quick."

Wabeeno took a number of thongs from his pocket and proceeded to tie the tree in its bent position. One thong extended from near the top to the base of the trunk. Another was made fast to one of the projections on the ledge that Mayberry had likened to handles.

This done, the Indian hunter proceeded to suspend other thongs from near the top of the tree in the form of a noose, the bottom of which lay along the ground. He scraped leaves and twigs over this part of the noose and then took a comb of wild honey from a cavernous pocket of his buckskin jacket and fastened it to the thong that ran from the bent tree top to the handle on the ledge.

"All right," said he, backing away.

Mayberry, whose eyes were bulging with growing light on the tragedy, stepped close to the ledge and examined the knot by which the thong was fastened there.

"I can see," he said, drawing a deep breath; "it might happen—did it happen, Mukwa?"

"You see," was the ambiguous reply.

The knot was adjusted with considerable delicacy over the projecting nub of rock, and the intent was clear—a sufficient disturbance would release the knot, and the tree, held down by the strain of only the thong that was fastened to its base, would rise suddenly, thus drawing up the noose and holding whatever might be in it at the time.

"Indian," remarked Mukwa, "sometimes make mistake in tying knot. Tie-um too hard; sometimes too loose. Indian smart, but sometimes he find Mukwa smarter than him."

The vague significance of this assertion depended upon knowledge of the meaning of Mukwa's name—"bear."

Mayberry's heart was beating high, for he thought he understood. He longed to have the explanation set forth in words, but he knew the Indians would be adverse to that, so he simply said: "Well, what next?"

For reply the Indians led them by a roundabout, easy way to the top of the cliff, whence they could look straight down at the trap. All four lay flat, with their hands at the very edge of the cliff.

"Mebbe wait long time," whispered Mukwa. "Bear gone 'bout two hours. Not come back till night, mebbe. But he come, sure, and he like honey. You see."

It was indeed a long wait. Noon came, and yet no bear or other animal to disturb the trap. Mr. Osborne sighed wearily.

"If you were in my place, sir," said Mayberry, "you'd find no wait too long for what I think will be demonstrated."

"I understand," replied the capitalist. "I'm tired of this, but you couldn't drag me away with a yoke of oxen."

The whites shared their provisions with the Indians and more time passed.

At length, around two o'clock, the Indians touched their white companions warningly. Neither Mayberry nor Mr. Osborne had heard any suggestive sound, but the Indians had, and, sure enough, a moment later a black bear came waddling leisurely from the growth of larger trees toward the north.

He seemed at peace with all the world, as if he might be reflecting tranquilly after a heavy dinner. But as he was passing the base of the cliff he paused and sniffed the air inquiringly.

Presently he located the honey and took a cautious step toward it. Then suddenly he drew back and squatted on his haunches, waving his head from side to side. There could be no doubt as to what was the process of his thought;

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he was considering the uncommon and abnormal shape of the sapling.

If Mayberry had not been so tense with excitement he would have had to laugh at the grotesquely human suggestions in the bear's attitude and movements.

For a full minute at least the bear kept wagging his head, his small eyes blinking curiously at the tree and greedily at the honey. Finally he hitched backward till he was well beyond the base of the sapling, when he ventured once more to use his fore paws in locomotion.

He walked in gradually narrowing semicircles around the sapling until he brushed against it. Then he squatted again and sniffed at the thong attached to its base.

Decision seemed to come upon him suddenly, for, with a good deal of vigor, he hitched forward till he could grasp the thong in his fore paws, whereupon he began to yank and bite it. In a few seconds he had severed the thong.

Instantly the tree sprang with a noisy rush, as it fanned the air, to its normal position. The thong around the "handle" of the ledge had been snapped in two, and the honey attached to it had been shaken to the ground.

Up in the tree top now the noose meant for the bear's neck, or body, rather, was dangling harmlessly.

The bear squatted again and proceeded to gorge himself with the honey. It seemed to Mayberry too bad, but Indian nature had to have its way; and, the exhibition of brute sagacity having been ended, Wabeeno's rifle spoke once, and the bear rolled backward, a bullet in his heart.

"He deserved to get away!" exclaimed Mayberry, rising.

Both Indians grunted their indifference to this fine feeling, and Mr. Osborne said, "There is but one thing left to do to show how poor Colburn came to his death. You said you had the implement with which the deed was done."

"Yes," Mayberry responded, "it's in my tent—a wedge-shaped piece of rock. It was one of the 'handles' of this cliff."

"Undoubtedly; but, to make absolutely sure, you must get it and find the spot from which it was wrenched off."

"I will do so, but, first, I think we can find where it was."

"Wabeeno show you," said Mukwa.

They hurried down to the base of the cliff and Wabeeno pointed to a fresh scar on its face and spoke in Ojibway.

"He says," translated Mukwa, "that this bear is the wisest of all the bears in the woods. Wabeeno has been after him a long time, but this bear very smart and always get away.

"Two days ago, just before the big storm, Wabeeno found lot of honey. He know the bear walk this way every day. So he make a trap, as you see. He think bear get caught in noose and hang till Indian come and kill-um. So, next day, 'cause Wabeeno no like to be out in storm, he come to find bear. Honey gone, tree straight again, and Wabeeno think hard. Then he see mark on rock and know what happen. He tell me yesterday when I find him. Then I know all about it."

"It's clear enough now," said Mayberry. "When the bear sprang the trap the first time, the knot happened to be tied to a nub of the ledge that had been partly disintegrated by the elements. So it yielded when the sudden strain came and the knot happened to be so tied that it carried the stone up into the air. Once get the knot upside down, as would, of course, be the case when the tree had risen to its full height, and the stone would slip out; but by that time it had gained a tremendous impetus. The tree and thong, you see, Mr. Osborne, were like a giant arm wielding a sling, and the fragment of stone was hurled a great distance.

"By what you rightly called a strange trick of fate, the stone fell upon Colburn's head. It must have happened just after our tent blew down. The final proof will be made when I fit the fragment over the scar that Wabeeno has shown us."

He was about to start back to the camp when all observed that men were approaching. Stilson led, with his rifle, and Harry Osborne, similarly armed, pressed close behind. Then came the Indian guides, and, last, Mr. J. Foster, of Pahquatasing, escorting Miss Rose.

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"It's all right," called Mayberry, comprehending the situation. "The shot you heard announced the death of Colburn's murderer; but it was not a human being."

The others ran up hurriedly. They had been growing more and more anxious over the prolonged absence of Mr. Osborne and Mayberry, and when they heard Wabeeno's rifle, they were morally certain that one or both of them were in peril. Hence the march to the rescue, the whites dreading ambuscades, the Indian guides stolidly certain that nothing had gone amiss.

Explanations followed swiftly, and Mayberry left Mr. Osborne to finish them while he hurried back to camp for the fatal fragment of rock. He gave Robertson an idea of the circumstance, to which the woodsman calmly responded, "I told ye it was none of my Indians' work. I did think it was Stilson, and I'm glad to find that I was wrong."

Returning to the cliff, Mayberry applied the fragment to the scar. It fitted to a hair, and his expert eye distinguished the traces of disintegration that had made the occurrence possible. He saw much more at the same time, but he made no mention of it until near evening. By then the general jubilation had subsided.

Miss Rose had long since dried her tears of happiness, Stilson had ceased to prance and hooray like a boy, and Mr. Osborne had given over pacing the flat rock to work off his excitement. Mukwa had resumed his place in the expedition, and at last talk began as to what should become of it.

"In our joy at the relief of all men from horrible suspicion," said Mr. Osborne, "we do not forget, I am sure, to mourn the untimely end of a man who was energetic and faithful according to his lights. I quite understand that Colburn had a sad gift of making trouble for those with whom he was associated, but all that is past now, and I have no doubt that none of us harbors ill feeling for the dead. How is that, my friend?" and he turned to Mukwa.

The Indian took his pipe from his mouth and a quaint smile drifted slowly over the swarthy features.

"All right, now," he said. "Indian no like Colburn, but Colburn he no like Indian. That even, uh? All right now."

Mr. Osborne could not repress a smile at his partial failure to surprise the red man into an expression of magnanimity.

"I think," said Robertson gravely, "that I can speak for the Indians. They are not revengeful and they are anything but deceitful. They don't say much, but when they do talk you know exactly what they mean. When Mukwa says it's all right, he means that he has no ill will to the memory of Mr. Colburn, for that would be a waste of feeling. It's all over, and that's all there is to it."

"That right," assented Mukwa, and he went on smoking again.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Osborne, "we must consider the future of the expedition——"

"Concerning which," interrupted Mayberry, "I would like a private word with you."

They walked a little way from the others, and Mayberry announced that the ledge where the bear trap had been set presented remarkable promise of mineral wealth.

"There's gold in sight there," said he. "For the present, at least, the expedition should go no farther."

In brief, thus it was decided. The further work of the expedition having passed without misunderstandings or serious adventures, may be summarized in a few lines.

At Mayberry's advice, after some days of prospecting, the syndicate, through Mr. Osborne, bought a large tract of land in the vicinity of the spot where Colburn met his death, and the mine, which has been under successful operation for two years, was called the "Gitchemukwa," after the faithful Indian who led the way to its discovery.

Mr. Osborne and his daughter remained at the camp until no further doubt existed as to the advisability of securing the property, and when they departed it was with the understanding, since carried out, that Miss Rose should become Mrs. Mayberry before the holidays. All that summer, however, May-

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berry and his favorite pupil remained with their Indian guides in the woods.

In course of time the relatives of the unfortunate Colburn were hunted up, and to them was given such share in the mining property as would have been his had he lived. This was largely at the insistence of Mayberry, his wife heartily seconding his efforts in the matter.

Stilson, too, has his share in the prosperous company and holds the office of treasurer. His offices are in New York, where he is content to stay, one trip into the wilds having been enough for him.

Pahquatasing is, as before, an unfinished pioneer town, and the most unfinished part of it is Donald Robertson's house; but a school has been started there, and his children are attending it; and Don says that, next season, he certainly will refuse any and all offers to guide parties into the woods, and give his undivided attention to putting a civilized roof over his flock.

And when J. Foster and G. Bagley hear this, they exchange winks.

THE END.

ROSSVILLE'S FOURTH.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

A midsummer happening that made the station-master think quick and take big chances.

THE busy little telegraph sounder on the table beneath the wide-shaded oil lamp had clicked itself to a standstill. From its perch on the wall of Rossville's railroad station the big clock chimed the hour of eleven. Kenton stretched out his legs, lighted his pipe, and yawned contentedly.

Work was over for another day—active work, at any rate, although he would have remain until the midnight express had roared through Rossville on its way westward.

But that last hour of the day was always easy and, on this occasion, promised to be even pleasant, for across the table sat young Finley, cashier of Rossville's diminutive bank and Kenton's particular chum.

Before him lay a couple of telegraph blanks, well scribbled with figures, and as Kenton leaned back he pushed them away and grinned across the table.

"Jim," he remarked," the people of this benighted town showed remarkable astuteness, didn't they?"

"How?"

"In appointing you and me the committee of two to arrange their Fourth of July celebration, of course."

"Eh? Oh, to be sure they did," laughed Kenton.

"If I do say it, we've fixed up a display for them that can't be touched for the money this side of Chicago! Why, Jim, when they started that subscription movement to buy fireworks, and requested us to engineer the thing, I imagined that we'd have about six dollars to spend, all told. Do you know just what they did chip in?"

"Not to the penny."

"Then listen! Rossville," said Finley, with mock impressiveness, "has placed in our hands the sum of two hundred and forty-one dollars and sixty-five cents! Think of it! This borough has actually wrung nearly two hundred and fifty dollars out of itself—just for fireworks! There's your unquenchable patriotism, fast enough. Two hundred and one dollars have gone for fireworks; Stanley's going to charge us forty dollars for his band, afternoon and evening. I think we'll pocket the odd sixty-five cents for our trouble."

"Put it into lemons and distribute free lemonade," chuckled the telegraph operator from behind his cloud of smoke.

"Seriously, however, we've done nobly, Jim. By George! We had to do nobly! Every little kid in town—and most of the grown-up ones—is on edge to see that display, and it's only five days off now. To-morrow or next

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day we'll find some one to put the frames up in the square for the set pieces. I guess we'll let off the rockets and the bombs, and so on, in the middle of the green. Then for the——"

"Hush!" interposed Kenton.

"Eh?"

"Listen."

For a moment they sat in silence. Down the long platform footsteps could be heard, approaching the office window.

Unostentatiously Kenton slipped the revolver out of the drawer and laid it across his knees. Visitors at that hour occasionally had designs on the company's safe.

"Queer!" muttered Finley. "Who the deuce is it, this time of night, Jim?"

"Dunno," said the operator briefly.

The shuffling tread approached the open window and stopped. A roughly-bearded face, originally well-featured, but decidedly disreputable and furtive, appeared in the casement.

"Say, boss!"

"Well?" Kenton sighed with relief; it was only a tramp."

"Is they another train goin' west tonight?"

"Yes, sir. Want a berth in the sleeper?"

Finley laughed slightly, but the tramp seemed unaffected.

"Guess not, mister. It ain't my style; but if you don't feel too fresh to listen, mebbe I can save you some trouble."

"What's that?"

"I walked up the track here, from Boontown, just now."

"Well?"

"Well—somebody's trying to wreck yer train—that's all."

"Eh? What? Where?"

"Up to the bridge, boss—the big bridge five or six miles this side of Boontown. 'Bout three miles up grade from here. Somebody's pried off the rails a full fifty feet. When yer old train comes along, she's goin' to slide plump off and down inter the river—forty feet o' clear drop!"

"My God!" gasped Kenton, starting to his feet, "you're not certain of it?"

"Didn't I see it?" demanded the man. "Ain't I just been there? I tell you, there ain't a sign of a rail on either track for fifty feet!"

"Both—both tracks?"

"Sure thing, boss."

Kenton groaned aloud.

The midnight express! By this time it must be well toward Belden, twenty-two miles to the east. Thank Heaven, he could catch it there!

But the twelve-fifty express, going eastward——

His finger was already on the key.

"B-n, B-n, B-n, B-n!" rattled off.

"Yes?" queried a sleepy operator at Belden.

"Rossville. Track has been taken up at bridge this side of Boontown. Have express held at this station. Repeat."

"Hold express at Rossville. But——"

"Hold express at Rossville," Kenton reiterated. "I'm going down on the hand-car.

"Here! Get these red lanterns lit, will you?" he cried aloud. "I'm going for more. We'll have to cross the bridge and hold up that late freight and anything else that may come along, and——"

Kenton had disappeared in the storeroom, and Finley busied himself kindling the wicks of the two red lanterns, the danger signals.

The operator came speedily into view once more with another pair, set them on the table and proceeded to light them as well.

"May need 'em all," he said. "Come along, Dick. I'll lock up the office."

Kenton slammed the safe and twirled the combination, closed the office door, and pocketed the key. He ran after Finley to the platform, where the tramp stood.

"Say, you can move quick, can't you?" observed that person genially.

"Have to, sometimes. Want to give us a lift on the hand-car?"

"Guess not," grinned the wanderer. "Work ain't in my line."

"All right. Wait here, then," Kenton called as they hurried across the tracks to the siding where stood the little hand-car. "I'll see that you get something for this, my man."

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"You bet I'll get something for it, youngster," muttered the bearded one. "And a blamed sight more than you think! I'll get what I've been waiting three years to get."

Propelling the hand-car up the three-mile incline left no breath for conversation.

Kenton wondered and Finley wondered what could have prompted the dastardly attempt to destroy the midnight express and whatever other trains might have passed before news of the outrage reached either Rossville or Boontown; but with the heavy lever to keep in motion there was no chance for discussion.

The great point was to reach the bridge at the earliest moment, and they toiled like beavers. One long mile—two—three; and they arrived at the short grade which led to the bridge.

The time for caution had come; or they might meet the fate planned for the fast train.

With brakes set hard, they slid slowly down toward the skeleton steel structure, straining their eyes ahead to locate the exact spot where the tracks had been removed.

A scant hundred yards separated them from the railroad bridge; then only fifty. Yet the track appeared to be in perfect condition! Not a break was in sight—not a rail seemed to have been shifted the tenth part of one inch.

The track, far from being torn up, was in splendid shape!

"Sold, b'gosh!" remarked Finley, as the car stopped and he mopped his dripping forehead. "There's nothing wrong at all!"

They rolled across the bridge and inspected the track on the westward side. Every spike was as solidly fixed as the day it had been driven!

"That's a queer game," said the bank cashier, as they crossed the bridge on the home stretch.

"Well, I suppose that scoundrel wanted a chance to get into the safe," growled Kenton. "We bit pretty nicely, eh? He'll be disappointed at any rate. I locked the safe and if he does get into it, he won't find more than ten dollars, but—what a sell on us!"

Kenton was warrantably exasperated. Finley laughed.

"Never mind Jim. We'll coast all the way home—that's one consolation."

"It's a mighty small one!" snapped the operator. "That scamp has put me into a pretty box, hasn't he? By this time, in all probability, he's tinkering with the safe. That'll have to be reported and its going to count against me; but it isn't the worst by a long shot. The road would rather see the train crew drawn and quartered than have that particular express held up for one minute—and now, I suppose, they'll be stalled at Rossville before we can get back and inform Belden that the alarm was false."

"But, good Lord, man!" Finley exclaimed. "You were justified in doing that. If the tracks had really been up——"

"That's all right, Dick, but they weren't; and the road considers the facts before they look over the possibilities. Any other time I could have stayed at Rossville and wired the operator at Boontown to hold the freight, but he's off to-night—ill or something. I'm in for a good wigging, if not worse. Stopping that midnight express without due cause is equivalent to murder on this line!"

"Well, let's get back and take it out of the tramp's hide," suggested Finley grimly.

"That tramp——" remarked Kenton thoughtfully, as they pushed slowly up the little incline from the bridge. "He seemed—by jimminy!"

"What's up now?"

"I know him!" cried the operator. "Of course I know him! That's why his infernal face seemed so familiar, in spite of the scrub and the dirt! Do you remember Danvers, the operator at Seabury, three years ago?"

"The fellow that started some kind of plant with the express agent and succeeded in stealing four thousand dollars from the railroad company?"

"The same. That tramp is Danvers, Dick! He went to State's prison for three years. He must have been just released. Do you remember reading of the scene in court when he was sentenced?"

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"I seem to. He swore vengeance on the road and everything connected with it, didn't he?"

"Yes. He was almost frantic when he realized that he was going to jail. He vowed to get square on the road if it took him a hundred years. He had to be removed bodily from the court-room. Melodramatic, eh?"

"Rather. Do you suppose that this can be his vengeance?"

"I'm hanged if I know," Kenton muttered. "It—it seems so blamed childish, doesn't it?"

They had halted the hand-car at the top of the incline, and a long, gentle slope of track lay before them. Getting back to Rossville would at least be an easy matter.

"Why the deuce did he want to get us away?" went on the operator. "It must have been the safe, yet he should know all the week's money was sent in to Chicago yesterday, just as it always is. Lord! Maybe he means to burn the station!"

"Hullo! What's that?" cried Finley.

"Boom!" The report was dull and very distant, but heavy as the firing of a huge cannon.

"Boom! it came for the second time, and they waited breathlessly.

The sound was not repeated; the night stillness remained unbroken as the seconds flitted by.

"Somebody getting a little previous with his Fourth of July, eh?" remarked the cashier taking a new grip on the lever. "Must be miles away."

"That—that was no cannon, Dick."

"No? What was it?"

"Blasting!" said Kenton, with conviction. "Blasting rock! You can't fool me on that sound—I worked around it too long. Why under heavens is any one blasting at midnight?"

"Give it up, old man. Ready to start?"

"Wait!" gasped the operator. "You know this country. There's hardly a rock larger than a hen's egg—except in one spot. That spot is the railroad cut through Bear Hill, where they blasted their way through a hundred yards of rock to make the track bed!"

"Well?"

"That blast, a minute ago, must have taken place there!"

"Nonsense."

"Danvers is working out some devilish scheme, I tell you! He may have drilled the rock and charged it with giant powder, right in the railroad cut! He must have done it! Then he came down to get us well out of the way, so that his scheme wouldn't be discovered in time to save the train.

"Don't you see, Dick?" cried Kenton frantically. "That devil has probably blown away one side of the cut, and the track may be piled yards high with rock at this very minute! When the midnight express comes tearing through the cut and hits it—oh, heavens!"

"God bless my soul!" cried Finley, thunderstruck.

"Yes, and it's loaded down with human beings! The traffic's fearfully heavy this time of year—and when those sleepers are piled up, smashed into splinters——"

With simultaneous impulse, Kenton and Finley sprang to the lever. In an instant the car was tearing down the incline toward Rossville.

In the first horror of the impending catastrophe, neither could formulate any plan for saving the doomed train.

They might reach the cut and find it filled with broken rock, five or six minutes before the express arrived—but what then?

Should the narrow defile be impassable, they must clamber over the obstruction and travel far enough along the line to signal the train. Obviously, that was impossible.

The midnight express was wont to speed furiously on the long stretch between Belden and Boontown; and even if they succeeded in getting their lanterns two or three hundred yards beyond the cut, it could hardly be in time to stay the impetus of the great locomotive and the heavy cars.

As the hand-car whirled down the grade toward Rossville, Kenton thought hard and fast. Very plainly he saw that their chances were long against averting the catastrophe.

He pictured the awful crash that must come, the grinding and smashing

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of cars and human beings together, the piled-up wreckage that might never have been there had he recognized Danvers on the spot.

Had he but known the man at once he might—nay, would—have suspected that some evil plot was in working; he could have held the train at Belden and forced the truth from the fellow at the pistol's point. But now——

A sudden inspiration flashed over Kenton.

The little lights of his own station were just ahead. He shouted to Finley and threw on the brakes.

The hand-car had hardly ceased to move when Kenton sprang to the platform.

"Come with me, Dick!"

"Great Scott, man!" You're not going to stop here?"

"Yes; come along!"

Running past the ticket office, the operator glanced through the window.

The safe seemed intact; Danvers was not in sight. At least the first part of his surmise was correct; robbery had not been the ex-convict's motive.

At the door of the little freight-house Kenton paused and Finley heard the rattle of his keys against the padlock. The portal swung open with a creak and the operator sprang into the building.

"This way, Dick. Give us a hand."

"Where?"

"Get this box out. No, this one. That's right."

"But what——"

"Get a grip underneath. Got it? All right. Lift!"

"To——to the car?" puffed Finley, staggering under his end of the heavy packing-case.

"Yep."

Together they bore the heavy burden to the hand-car and pushed it aboard. Kenton turned back like a flash, ran to the freight-house, and came scurrying back again, this time with a hatchet in his hand.

"Ready?" he shouted.

"Yes."

"All right. Push her for all she's worth, Dick. It's down hill all the way to the cut, but—shove her!"

Finley bent to the work. Kenton threw off his coat and attacked the box with his hatchet, and away they flew through the night once more.

The run to the cut was hardly two miles, but to the excited men it seemed interminable.

Each was straining his ears for the whistle of the midnight express; each expected, almost momentarily, to hear the crash that must mean death to so many.

After what seemed ages, they came in sight of the rocky defile.

Kenton's theory had been correct! The west track was choked and piled with huge blocks of stone, blasted from the rough walls above. Tons of it lay there, just as it had rolled down from the side after the explosion, waiting to shatter the midnight train.

"Right, by George!" exclaimed Finley, as they slowed down at the entrance to the defile. "The place is full!"

"How about the track we're on? Can we get through the cut?"

"I guess so."

Finley laid hold of the lever once more and Kenton aided him. Carefully, but at good speed, they worked along the narrow way.

Now they scraped sharply on a projecting fragment from the west track; now they collided with a small rock and managed to shove it from the rail. Then, with a sudden bump, they stopped completely. A fragment as large as a steamer trunk lay across their way. They were stalled half way through the cut!

"Toot! Toot! Toot-toot!!" The midnight express, now within hearing, had passed one of the crossings.

"Quick!" cried the operator. "Lift down the box, Dick! We've——"

"Huh!" ejaculated a gruff voice above them.

Kenton glanced up in astonishment. Silhoueted against the sky was a bearded profile—Danvers'!

"What are you doin' here, Jim Kenton? Get back out o' this, blast ye! Don't stick yer nose into this affair—hear? Get back or I'll blow yer head off! D'ye hear? I mean it. You light out!"

The moon peeped from behind a cloud and glittered on something in

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Danvers' hand—something white and shiny, that pointed straight at the pair in the cut.

Kenton set his teeth and drew a quick breath, as one hand slipped behind him. There was a sharp crack, a sudden flash of fire from the cut, a shriek from the rocky wall above. Danvers' head disappeared from the skyline and all was still.

"Toot! Toot! Toot!"

The whistle, startlingly near now, aroused them from the momentary shock of the episode. A tense calm came over Kenton.

"Hurry with this case, Dick," he said. "I meant to carry it to the end of the cut, but there's no time left now. Set it down on the track here—that's right. Hand over that lantern—no, the white one. Pick out the red boxes."

"It's the fireworks!" cried Finley.

"Yes—Rossville's fireworks, Dick. They came to-day. How many have you? Five? All right, I've got the other seven. Come on. Open them as you run."

Side by side they raced over the ties for another fifty yards, and out of the cut.

Kenton stopped and glanced ahead. Far away, but coming nearer at every second, the monster eye of the express confronted him. In the air was the dull hum of the long train.

"Not three miles off!" he exclaimed, kneeling on the track. "Dump the stuff here, Dick—right here, in a pile. All of it. There. So much for poor little Rossville's twelve pounds of red fire!"

Finley stared in fascination at the approaching light and stepped away from the tracks. Kenton crouched between the rails and produced his box of matches. A little more than one minute remained to him.

Shading the vesta behind his hand, he allowed it to flare well up and applied it to the pile of powder. A sizzle followed—then darkness.

He darted a glance toward that ominous circle of brilliancy and tried again. There was a sputtering, a hissing, a moment of suspense.

Then the red fire flared up suddenly. Rapidly it spread through the pile. The track, the cut behind them, the fields at the sides, all flamed with crimson.

Even the clouds above caught the fiery tint. The ground trembled with the vibration of the express.

For another long moment Kenton watched his danger signal. Then he stepped to Finley's side. Hardly had he left the track when the train passed.

At the time it seemed that destruction was inevitable. Though brakes were grinding and screaming, and uniformed men in the dim vestibules were working the air apparatus, and the great drivers were revolving backward, it appeared at the moment that no power could avert the collision.

Kenton and Finley ran after, as the cars whirled into the moonlit pass—slowly and even more slowly. They held their breath as the engine made at the blockade.

Perhaps only the locomotive itself would be shattered; perhaps—but the drivers had asserted themselves; with a final snort the great machine stopped, her nose in the rocks!

* * * *

Later on, Kenton and Finley were standing by the scene of the blast, with the second vice-president, whose rumpled hair and suspiciously pajama-like collar indicated that his slumbers had been broken by the episode.

The story had been told and retold. Danvers, very ugly, but temporarily paralyzed by a bullet in the upper end of his spine, had been well secured.

The second vice-president was taking a final look over the ground.

"I'm afraid I drew it on the train," that important personage was saying. "Danvers knew I'd be aboard, I have reason to think. I was the one who attended to his conviction, you know, and—why, bless me! there seems to be a quantity of splintered wood around here! And—er—isn't that a skyrocket?—and a big pin wheel?"

"I believe so, sir," replied the operator rather sorrowfully. "We were forced to leave the fireworks box on the track here. The red fire, you know, was part of Rossville's Fourth of July supply. The rest of the things"—Kenton sighed aloud—"seem to be strewed around here."

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"Ah, yes. Quite so. Mr.—er—Finley mentioned it, I believe, did he not? You and he, Mr. Kenton—a committee, or something of the sort, eh?"

"We were the committee on celebrations, sir, but I'm afraid that the committee's stock in trade is gone."

"My dear Mr. Kenton," said the second vice-president, "you may rest perfectly assured that if Rossville has not the fireworks display of its life this year, it will be because money can't buy it. As for you——"

As for Kenton, they did not make him president of the road, as would have been eminently fitting and proper, but they did take him into the main offices in Chicago; and at last reports the company's sign painter was lettering his name on a glass door, with the sub-title of —th assistant dispatcher, or something of the kind.

And even that is quite a respectable showing for the expenditure of a little energy and twelve pounds of red fire.

As for Rossville, to quote the *Corey County Argus:* "The tremendously lavish display of fine fireworks at Rossville, this Fourth of July, which is reported to have cost over two thousand dollars, has probably never been equaled in magnificence by any township of the same size in the Middle West—or elsewhere."

THE PHANTOM FLIER.

BY JARED L. FULLER.

A railroad story, dealing with the strange appearance of one train, the remarkable vanishing of another, and of how the two things linked themselves with the fortunes of a young Scot.

CHAPTER I.

"CHASING THE GOWK."

THE general manager of the R. & A. division on the great Northern & Northwestern Pacific trunk line was a walking invitation to the world to laugh!

Pious and old-fashioned parents, lacking materially in a sense of the ridiculous, had labeled him and sent him forth into the world to encourage the risibilities of all with whom he came in contact. Nature, seeing the joke, continued it by giving him a rotund body, which she crowned by a fat, ruddy face on a bullet head set in rolls of flesh in that portion of his anatomy which other men call the neck.

Obediah Buxton Jolley he was christened; "O. B. Jolley" was painted in black letters on the ground glass of his private office over the station at Racine, the Eastern terminal of his division. Malcolm Howe, dropping off the forenoon express from the East had a good half hour to study this name as he waited outside the general manager's door after sending in his card.

He had grown used to this waiting game since landing in New York six weeks before.

He had gone straight to the offices of the great New York & Mohawk Valley road in lower Broadway, and after some difficulty managed to see President Grosmith. But the man with whom he had played golf, and hunted over an impoverished Scotch estate the season before, seemed entirely different when met in his business office.

"The Yankee on a pleasure jaunt, and the Yankee in business, are two strangely dissimilar animals," Howe was fain to allow.

Grosmith was uncertain whether there was anything on his road just then at which the young Scot could turn his hand.

Howe was shown some social favors; it was whispered about that he was in the line of succession to an earldom, although that fact was of no earthly value to the young man, and he might have remained in New York indefinitely. But he had a special desire to get to work aside from the necessity of adding to his slender income.

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Besides, if the truth must be told, Hattie Grosmith had started for some mountain resort two days after Howe called upon her father, and young Howe cared little for New York society if he was not to meet the American railroad king's daughter. It appeared, after some days of waiting, that there was really no situation within Mr. Grosmith's personal gift that was suitable for his young friend Howe.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the great man, giving him a brief ten minutes out of a very busy morning. "You go west and try your luck. It's a great country. Lots of you boys from across the pond have made your mark in that growing territory. And the railroad business is wonderfully on the boom there.

"You'd not get ahead very fast in the East. We're too conservative; push doesn't count for much here; everything goes by favor and precedence. I couldn't give you a good chance on my own road without raising a row with my directors. But I'll give you letters to everybody along the line, and somebody'll be sure to offer you a good chance. Call to-morrow at noon and my clerk will give you the letters and your transportation. No! No thanks, my boy. Glad to do it for you. De-light-ed, I'm sure!"

Malcolm Howe wasn't quite a fool, and if he had an idea that Mr. Grosmith was shipping him West for some reason other than that of perfect friendliness, he gave no sign.

Of course, meeting a man on literally his native heath, and tramping with him over an estate which some day might fall to him with a coronet attached, is a nice thing to brag about after one gets back to New York; but having that man appear on the scene and run the chance of renewing his acquaintance again with a wilful girl like Hattie Grosmith——

Howe smiled grimly to himself and accepted the bundle of letters and transportation which Grosmith had prepared for him. The Scot was in earnest. He did not care to be considered a dangler after women, much as he would have enjoyed meeting the millionaire's daughter again.

His trail across the continent had been marked by the letters of introduction which he had delivered. They had gained him most courteous treatment and much good advice. Like the Salvation Army hymn sung on the streets of his native town, he was continually assured that "It was better farther on!"

Finally he had struck a man high up in the councils of the great Northern & North Western Pacific trunk line, and from him had been sent to Racine, where he now cooled his heels outside O. B. Jolley's door.

When he entered, and saw the plump little man with the moon-like visage and bald head behind the desk, his spirits rose unconsciously. He had met thin gentlemen, and fat gentlemen, and medium-sized gentlemen in the offices of the various railroads where he had applied; but each had been most serious, not to say stern, in manner and appearance.

But Jolley fitted his name; he looked the part; the man's personality as well as his name—which fact I have previously mentioned—was an invitation to laugh.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Howe, shaking the plump hand held out to him.

"Sit down," said the general manager of the R. & A. division, "and relieve your sin-burdened soul. What can I do for you, young man?"

"That's not the point," Howe declared with an answering smile. "The question is, What can I do for you?"

The general manager's gaze sought the letter which lay open upon his desk.

At first glance Howe had been convinced that this was not the note of introduction that he had sent into the private office with his card. He caught a glimpse of the engraved heading of the New York & Mohawk Valley Railroad, and by the look of the letter it had evidently been read by others, and passed on to O. B. Jolley.

"Your name is Howe?" said the general manager slowly.

A shadow of doubt had crossed his face. Those who knew the general manager of the Racine & Alton were

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well aware that it hurt him to refuse any favor to a man, or to be harsh even in a case deserving stern treatment.

"It is, Mr. Jolley. Malcolm Howe, at your service. I see that you have heard of me before," and he looked significantly at the open letter.

The general manager appeared disconcerted for a moment, but Howe went on:

"See here, sir. I don't know what manner of man you American's think I am. I have been both angered and amused by my treatment in this matter. We have an old game in our country which we play on All Fools' Day, called 'Chasing the Gowk.' We get some 'innocent' to carry a letter to a friend as though it was an important matter; that friend opens and reads the letter and, stating that he hasn't the article requested, writes another note and sends it on by the messenger to still another friend, until either the patience of the messenger is worn out, or he awakes to the fact that he is being made a fool of. Written in the note is this old doggerel:

'This is the first of Aprile
Chase the Gowk another mile.'

Now, Mr. Jolley, I'd give a good deal to see the contents of that letter before you."

The general manager's face had broadened while Howe was speaking. He now broke into a laugh in which the Scot was forced to join. But Jolley grew grave again after a minute.

"You're in a bad case, young man," he said. "I can assure you there is nothing said against you. Only, railroad officials are not anxious to set to work greenhorns—unless they are willing to begin a good way down the ladder.

"I don't know anything about your capabilities. You are a stranger to American customs. I don't know what you are good for. And I don't really know what the old Racine & Alton division would do with a live lord on its pay roll."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Howe, blushing as though he had been caught in something ungentlemanly. "I'm not a lord at all—nothing of the kind."

Jolly glanced questioningly at the well-thumbed letter lying before him.

"Mr. Grosmith, who happened to be my guest last season, heard some of the people call me 'the young laird.' But 'laird' does not always mean 'lord'—not in these days in Scotland. It's as though they called me 'squire.'

"That isn't to the point, however, Mr. Jolley. I am merely a young man looking for work. I have been interested in railroading. I have had a practical mechanical education; I am a civil engineer; and I'm willing to begin just as near the foot of the ladder as you wish me to."

"I tell you frankly, Mr. Howe, I don't know of a place on my road suitable to your talents."

"Suppose we leave my talents out of of the question," Howe spread out two very well-developed, if white, hands. "Those hands were made for work, I fancy. Have you anything for me? That is what I wish to know.

"I find," and Howe smiled sardonically, "that my dear friend Grosmith, in his eagerness to send me upon this Western trip, failed to supply me with return transportation. My passes are good in one direction only, and that direction toward the setting sun. It is 'Westward Ho!' for me; but I've 'westward hoed' about as far as I care to. I wish, like Noah's dove, to find a resting-place for the sole of my foot."

Jolley reached into a pigeon-hole and drew forth a little book in which were jotted down, under the head of the various departments, the situations then vacant, or about to be.

"We have nothing for another civil engineer to do, Mr. Howe," he said cheerfully; "and of course you are not fitted for the right seat of the cab. Most of our engine drivers are advanced from the fire-shovel, any way; the Brotherhood has something to say as to that these days—a good thing, too.

"I don't want to send you to the round house. Do you want a clerical position? No, I thought not. You want something that will give you a practical insight into at least one branch of the service. You are hard to suit, in that case. Hold! Would you be agent at a small station?"

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"If nothing better offered," replied the Scot steadily.

"Little passenger traffic, but considerable freight at certain seasons. Can you pound a key?"

"Operate the telegraph instrument? Yes, sir; fairly well, I believe."

"All the better, although there is an operator there. Usane is the place. It is about two hundred miles along the line."

He spread a map of the road before him and beckoned the young man to draw his chair nearer.

"You see here the entire length of the R. & A. Yes, it's got a crook in it like a giant's elbow; and that crook is the road's damnation. It is three hundred and fifty miles from Racine to Alton as the crow flies; this crook makes the running two hundred and fifty further—six hundred miles of rails altogether.

"The range is at fault. The only gap is Hammersly's, and is a very roundabout way. South, the Sierra Grande Road has the right of way through the only other gap in the range. The S. G. is our chief rival; it cuts the time between Racine and Alton, but thus far the influence of the N. & N. W. P., of which our road is now a branch, has kept the Sierra Grande from doing us any serious damage."

"Seems a strange way to build a railroad," remarked Howe, scrutinizing the map with interest.

"It grew of necessity. Somebody began to mine coal in those mountains. There was little good coal, and much that was poor. But in the first flush of the discovery the enterprise expected to supply the entire West with fuel. There was a short line running then from Racine up into the cattle country, and a spur was thrown out into the hills to give the coal mines service. On the strength of the coal-carrying business the main line was extended farther, and it being impossible to pierce the range nearer than Hammersly's Gap, money was raised to do this, and extend our rails as far as Alton.

"Then the coal mines went dry. For five years mineralogists puttered about the range to find more, and failed. Old man Ream, who tried it on the south side of the mountains, went mad over it, they say. Poor devil! He wandered into the hills years ago and never showed up again."

A clerk knocked and came in with another card which he handed to Jolley. Howe would have retired, but the general manager waived him back to his chair.

"Wait a minute. We might as well settle this matter of yours now as later. This fellow won't keep me long. And, speaking of angels——"

He tossed the card into Howe's lap. The Scot picked it up, looked at its face, and read aloud:

MR. SYLVESTER REAM.

CHAPTER II.

THE HAND THAT HOARDED, AND THE HAND THAT SCATTERED.

WHILE he glanced at the card Malcolm Howe moved his chair back to leave the way to Jolley's desk free for the newcomer. The door opened behind him and a high-pitched, drawling voice—a voice of most effeminate timber—said:

"My deah Mr. Jolley! So pleased!"

The general manager grunted, and put out his pudgy hand gingerly. By the look in his face Howe saw that the visitor, whoever he was, did not meet with Jolley's approval. But when he half turned himself to look at the speaker he was so astonished at his appearance that he sat there with dropped jaw and most impolitely stared at the owner of the engraved visiting card in his hand.

Mr. Sylvester Ream should have possessed, as a match for that voice, a slender and delicate physique, with a whisp of mustache coaxed with difficulty to maturity, and a simper.

In fact, however, he was six foot high, burly, of great apparent muscular development, and although he was dressed in the height of fashion, he carried the dress well. His affected manner of speaking, and languid air, did not in the least fit the man.

There was occasionally, a flitting expression over his rather handsome face that belied his effeminacy, too. His

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eyes were blue; now and then—as he noticed Malcolm Howe's open amazement—a flash came into those eyes that made them sparkle. The blue turned to steel color and looked dangerous.

"So kind of you to wire me the courtesy of your road at Alton. I had a delightful run in the Sylph," Ream pursued, squeezing warmly the general manager's grudgingly given hand. "I met Miss Alice and her mother in Alton and urged them to come through on my car; but Mrs. Fisher declared she could not leave yet."

"They'll come through in a day or two, Mr. Ream," grunted Jolley. "My own car will then be at their service."

"Sorry you have such a poor opinion of the Sylph as not to trust your sister and her daughter upon it," sighed the young man with an unbroken smile.

"Miss Alice is looking more charming every day."

Jolley was as glum as an owl.

"Always ready to extend the courtesies of the road to another railroad man," he said shortly.

"Even if that man owns such a jerkwater road as the Reamville & Alton, eh?" The visitor's laugh was not pleasant, and he narrowed his eyes as he continued to gaze at the evidently confused Jolley.

"See here, Jolley," drawled Ream. "Why don't your directors make me an offer for my road? If you ever wake up and tunnel the range, that hundred miles of rusty rails would be worth something to you."

"Huh! Tunnel nothing! Where'd we get the money to tunnel? Or to buy your road—at any price you'd sell it for?"

"Oh, I'm open to offers," said Ream airily.

"You've been offered twice every dollar the Reamville & Alton is worth. We've said our last word on that subject, sir," observed Jolley shortly.

"Oh, you don't appreciate the value of my property," cried Ream. "If you once get through the hills——"

"Oh, if a pig ever flies!" exclaimed the general manager. "Talk sense—if you can—Ream. The R. & A. will wait many a year before it pays *your* price for a hundred miles of single track."

Ream laughed nastily. "Meanwhile it will be true to its name 'Round and About'—eh? By Jove! That's a good one. I'll have to tell that to the boys. R. & A.—'Round and About.' D'ye see it, Jolley?"

"Go and tell it to the boys now," growled the general manager of the maligned road; "don't stay here and bother me with your jokes."

"Come, now, we're friends, Jolley. I'm friends with everybody. You'll take luncheon with me aboard the Sylph, won't you? I can't get transportation over the Sierra Grande for two hours yet."

"Sorry; shall have to decline," Jolley said, turning to his desk.

"Oh, come, now; let by-gones be by-gones. You're angry because I happened to find time to run down to Alton while Alice was there shopping——"

"Mr. Ream!" burst out the angry general manager; "you'll oblige me by not discussing private matters in public."

Young Ream favored Howe with a supercilious glance.

"Come down and talk to me over luncheon, then."

"I tell you I am engaged. This—er—this gentlemen,"—the general manager nodded at the young Scotchman—"is my guest. You must excuse me, Ream."

Howe covered a smile. The owner of the Reamville & Alton seemed to bear up nobly under his disappointment.

"All right, old man. Sorry to be deprived of your society. And let me thank you again for your courtesy. Notice you're handling a good deal of freight just now. The R. & A. is prosperous, I hope?"

"We're not borrowing trouble any way."

"Nor money?"

"Not from you," said the general manager curtly.

"I heard about your accident last week. You really ought to hire drivers with nerve. They say Jimson threw his engine because he thought he saw something ahead."

"You'll hear a good deal of trash if your ears are open."

"But, really, it's an amusing story.

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He says he saw a phantom train bearing down upon him, and thought it was a real one gone wild. Quite amusing."

"Old wives' fables. Jimson has lost his job. He's trying to explain why, I suppose," said Jolley, with unmoved countenance.

"I think some of giving him a job myself."

"Do so. He's just about fitted for a road that runs two trains a week."

"Oh, we don't have 'phantom fliers' on the Reamville & Alton," said the young man with another laugh, and the door closed behind him.

Jolley sighed and sat back in his chair.

"Silly ass!" he grumbled. "Coming in here and taking up my time. And—and you'll make my word good, won't you, Mr. Howe? I'd like you to lunch with me. I can talk further with you then."

"Thank you; I'll stay," agreed the Scotchman good naturedly.

"That fellow always stirs me up," continued Jolley, fussing with the papers on his desk. "I don't trust him—I never did. He's utterly without principle. I have it on good authority that when his old father wandered off into the hills, he showed mighty little interest in hunting for him.

"They say the unnatural rascal attempted to have the old man shut up in an insane asylum, or put under a guardian, or something of the kind, before John Ream disappeared. This young cub wanted to get the property into his own hands. Not that there was any too much ready cash when old Ream got through with it, however."

"John Ream was the man you were speaking of, who was interested in the coal mining?" asked Howe politely, but without an atom of interest in the subject.

"Yes. He owned a lot of land on the other side of the range. The mineralogists told him the vein of coal came through from this side of the mountain to his own property. He sank shafts, found the coal, and then built a railroad to Alton—near a hundred miles—to compete with our road.

"But his coal mine petered out, too. He was a miser, they say, and it broke his heart to keep dropping money into that hole—and the railroad, of course, didn't pay by itself. This big ass—this Sylvester Ream—was frittering away the money as fast as the old man could hoard it. And Silly Ream has continued the scattering process ever since he got complete control of affairs.

"He spends a good deal of his time riding about the country on his private car, presuming on the good nature of other railroad managers on the strength of his hundred-mile track. How he keeps out of the poorhouse I don't see. Guess everything is mortgaged up to the handle.

"Well, this is interesting gossip, but not for you," concluded the general manager, smiling again. "Just study that map of ours for a few minutes, while I look over this mail. Then I'll be ready to go out with you, and we can talk over your appointment as agent at Usane station at our leisure."

He seemed to think that Howe had already accepted his offer, and the young man was really tempted to give the thing a try. He liked Jolley, and to state a fact, his ready cash had been much depleted during this leisurely journey more than half way across the continent.

The position of agent at a station in the foothills might not be what he had expected when he boarded the steamship for this Land of the Free; but Jolley had treated him so much better than anybody else—was so much superior to Grosmith, even, on whom he really had some slight claim—that the Scotchman was inclined to connect himself with the Racine & Alton Railroad in even this humble capacity.

He glanced, as Jolley advised, at the map, across which the line of the R. & A. road made a broad, zigzag red mark, like a flash of forked lightning. He found the station of peculiar nomenclature, Usane, two hundred miles west of Racine, and on that portion of the road which lay in almost a direct line for Alton.

A few miles beyond Usane the road made the first divergence to the northward which resulted in that long, roundabout route through Hammersly's Gap. The mountain wall lay like

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a barrier between the two terminals of the road.

The connections were marked on the map in narrow black lines. He found the Sierra Grande Railroad, which likewise connected Racine with the other city farther west.

This rival to the R. & A. turned to the south, made a détour through another gap in the range, and reached Alton over a considerably shorter route than the R. & A. But it was apparent that the territory through which the more southern railway ran was far more thinly settled than that to the northward.

The young man was interested, too, in finding the short line leading back from Alton into the hills, which was named the Reamville & Alton. As he had heard that very unpleasant young man, Sylvester Ream, say, this short line was the very route the Racine & Alton could best use if it ever tunnelled the mountain range.

As he went down-stairs with Jolley to lunch the Scot mentioned this fact.

"It's true and he knows it. Though the Lord only knows how we'd get through the mountain in the first place," the general manager admitted. "Reamville is quite a sizable town, and from the nearest point on our road, this side of the range, it would only be about twenty-five—possibly thirty—miles, if we could tunnel the mountain. Besides, the Reamville tracks are laid some distance this side of the town, too—as far as John Ream's old coal mines.

"But, pshaw! It's nonsense to talk about it. It would take a power of money. The N. & N. W. P. isn't in the mood to advance it, although it would cut the running time between St. Louis and San Francisco more than twenty-four hours. The trunk line has a pull in Washington and we hold on to the mail, in spite of the fact that we carry it such a roundabout way.

"That puppy!" stuttered Jolley, suddenly remembering the pun Ream had made on the initials of his road. "He'll spread that all around the country, I s'pose. 'Round and About" isn't bad, just the same!" and the general manager chuckled, though with some mortification.

"But let's get down to your personal case. What do you think of accepting the position of agent at Usane?" Jolley really said it as though he considered Howe was doing him a favor if he took it. "It will be a bit lonely, I suppose; but it's the best I've got to offer. I'd like to do something for you; you've been chasing about enough." He grinned with appreciation. "That story of yours of the Gowk is a good one. I'll have to tell that."

"You're at liberty to. I fancy my part in it sounds as well as Grosmith's."

"He's a big man," said Jolley reflectively. "He's a stockholder or director in every railway system in the country. His word is law to many general managers. If he'd said the word a place could be made for you in the N. & N. W. P. itself. But what I offer——"

"Say no more," said Howe shortly. "Half a loaf is better than no cake. I'll take this chance."

"When will you go?"

"Any time. I hope you won't forget me, Mr. Jolley, when I am buried there in the hills."

The general manager pursed up his lips shrewdly.

"Well, I've found that the man who allows himself to be forgotten is better let alone. There mayn't be much chance to make a killing as Usane," he added hastily, "but you might do something.

"I'll send you down to-morrow. The old agent will stay two or three weeks with you—as long as you want him. Better say nothing about your not having had experience. It might work you harm. There is some responsibility connected with the situation, too."

"Not much going on in that region, I fancy?" asked the Scot.

"We-el, sometimes. There has been a hold-up or two during the past year. and now this foolishness about the wreck last week——"

"What is that?" queried Howe, as the general manager hesitated. "Didn't Ream say something about a phantom train? What is it?"

"All moonshine!" exclaimed Jolley with disgust. "Jimson, the engineer of the train that was wrecked, swears he

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saw a train ahead of him on the track. He stopped so quickly he threw his engine off the rails. Cost us a pretty penny. It's some old-woman's story of a ghostly train that runs at night over a part of the road. Ah!"

Jolley sat up and pointed out of the restaurant window. A train was just starting, and attached to it was a very gaily painted car—all silver and maroon, with broad windows and an observation parlor on the end. On the broad maroon stripe which ran the length of the car below the windows was painted the word "Sylph."

"What do you think of that?" said Jolley. "There's the fellow who scatters the money. Nice looking private car, isn't it? I wouldn't ride in it to a dog-fight. It looks like one of Barnum & Bailey's circus cars."

Howe caught a glimpse of the proprietor of the Sylph, the muscular but effeminate Sylvester Ream, sitting languidly in the glass-enclosed parlor, as the car was whipped out of the station at the tail of the express.

CHAPTER III.

THE JUMPING-OFF PLACE.

So Malcolm Howe telegraphed for his baggage and gun-case, which were landed at the Usane station from the very train on which he himself traveled from Racine.

He had spent the afternoon and evening of the previous day in studying the R. & A. division and in learning something of the duties required of a local agent of a railroad corporation.

Perhaps no other agent ever began his work after having it fully explained to him by the general manager of his road. Jolley had taken a fancy to the young Scot, and Howe had even spent his one night in Racine at the general manager's home.

That rotund gentleman was a bachelor. His housekeeper was a widowed sister who, with her daughter, had lived more than ten years in her brother's household.

At this time Mrs. Fisher and her daughter were away from home; but Jolley let drop several remarks which showed Howe that his niece was very dear to the general manager of the R. & A.

The young fellow, however, was too greatly interested in his own affairs, especially in the situation which he had accepted at Usane, to feel any curiosity regarding Jolley's family. The brief conversation between Jolley and Sylvester Ream the day before had quite slipped his mind, too; Howe stepped off the train at the Usane station eager only for a view of the place before the dusk fell.

And, to the ordinary person landing here with the expectation of making Usane his home, this first view would have been depressing. But Howe had been born amid the rugged hills of Scotland, and the drab-sided, tree-crowned mountains which rose all about the settlement did not stagger the young man.

The houses themselves, however, lacked the first picturesque attribute; but this fact he did not realize until the following morning when, coming out of the weather-beaten "hotel," behind the station, he viewed in all its ugliness the squalid town.

Unpainted shacks for the most part lined Usane's main street. There was a straggling, easy-going, shiftless look to the place quite in keeping with the quality of its inhabitants.

Robinson, the retiring agent, gazed upon Howe in wonder.

"Great Jupiter, man!" he exclaimed "you look to be neither poverty-stricken, crossed in love, a dyspeptic, or a man escaping from criminal prosecution. What drives you to bury yourself here? I've stood it a year, and I wrote old Jolley that, if he didn't give me something else to do, I'd go off my nut entirely. Usane! Why, this should be called *In*-sane! It's the jumping-off place."

"Is it so very slow?" asked Howe, smiling.

"Slow! Look out of that window, man!"

They were sitting in the tiny ticket-office, from which a view of the main street was possible.

"See those cow-punchers against the fence yonder? And they *are* cow-

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punchers for fair. There's a mighty difference between that hang-dog lot and the real cowboys who work steadily on the various ranches below here. Those fellows would freeze there if a blizzard came along. Nothing will make 'em move but an invitation to drink. The whole place is dead to the world."

"Nothing ever happens here, eh?"

"No! I've wished, time on end, that Silver Jack, or some other 'bad-man,' would come in and shoot-up the town, and try his teeth on the safe yonder. There's not much in it, excepting when the cattle-shippers pay their freight bills."

"Who's Silver Jack?"

"A half-real, half-mythical personage who is supposed to be at the back of all the hold-ups in these parts. Yes; we have had a few trains stopped during the year. But it never happens here at Usane; always down the road farther," with a thumb-gesture over his shoulder deeper into the wilderness.

For Usane lay upon the long slope which began fifteen miles east, at Giggin's Ridge, and ending ten miles below where the track reached the level of the Waukane Valley. From the station the ascending rails could be followed for some distance; but the wood below soon shut them out of sight to the westward.

There was a switch here at Usane; but the Racine & Alton division was really a single-track road from the summit of Giggins Ridge westward for a good many miles. This was a short switch track, for the long freight trains never passed each other at Usane. The cattle men loaded their stock into the cars on this short switch.

"Nothing but train robberies to liven one up?" queried the Scotchman, with the doubt of his nation when first confronted with an American joke. "I fancy that is overstating the case, Mr. Robinson."

"Well, we had a smash-up the other night. That's not so much fun, and is much more dangerous. I hear the engineer lost his job, too."

"Seems to me I heard something of that," said Howe. "The driver's name was Jimson, wasn't it?"

"Yes. He got rattled—or frightened—— Humph! Well, we're not talking about it much."

"What was the cause of the accident?"

"Some think whisky," grunted Robinson. "Others say different."

"I've heard he saw something—or thought that he did—and stopped too short," suggested Howe curiously.

"Then you've heard of the 'phantom flier'?"

"What is it?" asked Howe, noncommittally.

"I—give—it—up!" The man was quite serious and bent toward the Scot. "You can just listen to what I tell you, and then you can either believe I'm lying, or that staying in this God-forsaken hole for twelve months has made me nutty.

"I don't know anything about Jimson's ability as an engineer. But his story of seeing a ghostly train isn't a new one. I heard of the 'phantom flier' a week before he had his wreck.

"Old Bob Harding drives the engine of No. 60, local freight. You'll come to know him. He's a good fellow, and as careful an engineer as there is on the division.

"He lays over here on his off night—when he has one, I mean—because his son-in-law lives in this place. He told me, sitting in that very chair you occupy, Mr. Howe, that one night down in the valley, not twenty miles from this station, at a siding on the bank of the Waukane, which is seldom used now by the road, with his train steaming along at a good forty-mile clip and trying to make Valley Station, going west, he passed an engine and one or two cars standing on that siding."

"What is there strange in that?" asked Howe.

"But she stood there *dead*. There is a sharp curve as you come on the siding, and old Bob didn't see the train until he was fairly at the switch. There wasn't a light in the window, the locomotive was stone cold, and not a living soul appeared to be about.

"It was a foggy night and the mist is apt to be thick down there in the valley toward two or three o'clock. The train looked white and ghostly.

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"Well, he was so astonished he let No. 60 run clean by before he reversed. Then he wanted to back up and see what it meant, but his conductor, who'd been asleep in the hack, wouldn't hear to it. Nobody saw the strange train but old Bob and his stoker; and the stoker wasn't sure."

"The man dreamed it," Howe suggested.

"Old Bob isn't a dreamer. He swears the phantom train stood there. A passenger was following No. 60, about an hour behind. Old Bob saw the engineer of the passenger in the morning, and the latter swore the siding was empty when he passed."

"No way of a train running on from any branch?" asked Howe.

"There is no branch—excepting the old track to the abandoned coal mines in the hills yonder. That hasn't been in use for years, and it ends in a blind pocket, of course. There's no way to explain the 'phantom flier,' I tell you. You've got to disbelieve it, and that's all I can say!"

He shook his head gloomily.

"What Jimson saw, I don't know. He swears he turned the curve down yonder and almost ran into the tail of some sort of a train. He jambed the brakes to her, and reversed, and his engine jumped the rails. When he and his fireman came to, the train he swears he came near ramming was gone!"

"It's all foolishness," declared the Scot, shaking his head.

"I told you so," declared Robinson, laughing.

Howe took hold of the work of the station, despite Robinson's croakings, with some little interest.

It was true this was not the position he would have chosen in which to begin his railroad experience; but he determined that Jolley should not forget him here at Usane. The country was not poverty-stricken; rather, it was undeveloped.

"I may have come over here to America under a misapprehension," he told himself at the end of the first day, while lying in his cot over the noisy barroom of the Sierra Grande House, "but a railroad man I will be. This is a small beginning; but it *is* a beginning."

Aside from the ordinary duties which were his, Howe began to study the freight situation.

The Waukane River was a wide and deep stream, watering a fine grazing country. At the flood seasons flat-bottomed barges—mere rafts, they were—navigated the river. The falls precluded any freight traffic by water as far as Racine; therefore the river flowing northward carried the business, such as it was, far away from the Racine & Alton railroad to a branch of another system.

This was a matter Howe determined to consider later. A spur track from the foot of the grade to the river bank, a well-built dock, a few flat-bottomed steamboats on the Waukane, such as he had seen at St. Louis, and he was sure the entire freight traffic of the upper country might be revolutionized.

And Usane was the station nearest to the river, although hanging far above it on the mountainside.

Still, this was but a thought at the back of his mind. The disappointment he had experienced on first coming to the country, was laid away, too. Howe determined to give all his present attention to the duties which he must learn to relieve Robinson.

This first day he noticed a handsome observation car pass, attached to one of the express trains going west.

"That's old Jolley's car," said Robinson. "His sister and that pretty girl, Alice Fisher, are in Alton. Reckon they're coming back to-morrow or next day."

But Howe scarcely noticed his remark until, as prophesied, two days later the afternoon express came puffing up the grade with the handsome private car as its tail coach.

A freight train of more than usual weight had got upon the time of the express and there was considerable bad language and more telegraphing back and forth when the fast train was forced to stop at the Usane station.

Something had happened to the freight before it could be sidetracked on the long switch above. The sidetrack at Usane could not accommodate the freight; indeed, the track was not long enough to accommodate the ex-

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press train, with the additional length of the manager's private coach.

Howe paid little attention to the fuming conductor and engineer of the express, who had both left the train to hang over the agent at the instrument inside; but he had curiosity enough to walk down the long platform on the chance of seeing Mrs. Fisher and Alice, of whom O. B. Jolley had spoken so warmly.

And the girl certainly was attractive looking—*petite*, dark, with eyes that were on the verge of laughter most of the time, Howe thought; and her mother was a comfortably, plump matron, much like her brother, the general manager.

"Nice folks," thought the Scot, and he could not help comparing them with the Grosmiths, and some other people whom he had met East.

He turned back and had paced almost to the head of the train, the engine of which stood directly opposite the little station, when there was an eruption of excited men from Robinson's office.

The conductor, the engine driver, a brakeman, and a loiterer or two, seemed all to have grown suddenly mad. In Western parlance, a more *locoed* group it would be hard to imagine, and from the babel of voices Malcolm Howe made out not the slightest sense in what they said.

He saw Robinson inside, still bending over the telegraph instrument. Howe ran to the window and pushed up the sash, which was supplied with no catch.

"What's the matter, Mr. Robinson?" the Scot demanded.

As long as Malcolm Howe lives he will never forget the face that the agent turned upon him. Robinson was naturally of a volatile disposition, and his tirades against his twelve months at Usane to the contrary, he looked jolly enough at most times.

But now——

In these few moments since Howe had seen him chaffing the angry conductor and driver of the engine, the man appeared to have aged twenty years. And it seemed as though something worse than age had gripped him, too.

He looked actually hollow-cheeked; his eyes glared, the sweat stood upon his brow, and he panted as though he had been running instead of sitting in his chair over the instrument.

"My God, Howe, old man!" he whispered, in a cracked voice. "Is—is that you?"

"What's the matter?" repeated the Scot, reaching into the office and shaking the agent by the arm.

"That—that freight's broke in two. Four cars are coming down the grade without a soul aboard 'em to set the brakes."

His listener grasped the situation swiftly.

"Why don't they run this express on to the siding?"

"With the manager's car, it's too long to be accommodated on the short track. My God! It's awful. They can't run away from it, either. Hear that?"

Howe was aware of the distant roaring of the runaway.

"And, worse than all, two of those runaway cars are carrying dynamite!" gasped Robinson. "If we back the express and try to derail the runaway here, that explosive will blow all Usane to the demnition bow-wows!"

Howe staggered back from the window, his eyes seeking the wood-enshrouded height above. The sound of the runaway box cars grew momentarily upon his startled ear.

CHAPTER IV.

HOWE MAKES A HIT.

Warning of the approaching cars, with their cargo of death, had spread with the swiftness of a wave of light among the loiterers on the Usane platform.

Howe could see them running for safety into the wood on the further side of the track and up the street, shouting the warning into stores and saloons as they sped along.

Less than a minute had elapsed since he had seen the conductor and engine driver come out of the office. The latter had swung himself upon his locomotive; but he now hung out of the window of his cab in uncertainty.

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The express could not escape the charge of the runaways by backing. To drive the train down the grade swiftly enough to distance the runaways would mean ditching the string of cars at the first curve.

Before the passengers could be unloaded, the box cars would smash into the drawhead of the engine. Little wonder that both conductor and engineer were uncertain what course to pursue.

Howe's mind seemed to clarify the instant he knew the danger which menaced. He sprang to the step of the cab and looked up eagerly into the pale face of the engineer.

"Is the switch long enough for the train, barring the manager's car?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir!" was the astonished reply.

"Then back her and run on to the side-track. I'll look out for the private car. Quick now, there's not a moment to lose!"

He ran along the platform toward the rear of the train. The engineer was only too glad to fall under somebody's orders, and the train started with a jerk.

The conductor ran himself to open the switch below the station. The switch above was closed, so that the box cars descending the slope would keep to the main track.

Howe caught the hand-rail of the private car and swung himself aboard. He dashed into the corridor, drove the porter and cook, as well as the ladies' maid who traveled with the general manager's family, into the next car forward.

Then the young man burst into the compartment in which Mrs. Fisher and her daughter sat.

"Go at once into a forward car, ladies!" he commanded. "Stop for nothing—move quickly, please! There is a runaway coming down the hill, and this car may have to be sacrificed."

He saw, even in his own excitement, that the girl was much less alarmed than her mother. At least, she seemed to be able to grasp on the instant what was demanded of them.

Seizing the older lady's hand, she dragged her through the corridor and out at the front door. Howe fairly pushed them across the swaying platform, for the train was still backing.

Then the string of cars stopped with a jerk; the engine had been reversed. At the moment of the change Howe "broke out" the coupling between the manager's car and the one forward.

The train started forward, the engine dragging it over the switch on to the siding; but the private car continued to descend the grade.

Howe remained with the single coach, which moved more and more swiftly as the distance between it and the departing train increased.

Above the pulling of the engine rose the roar of the oncoming runaway. Howe saw the last car, with the two women still upon the platform, whipped over the switch on to the siding. There was barely room on that spare track for the express.

The main line was clear now, and Howe, as the manager's car bore him down the hill, could see for miles up the straight track. A cloud of dust, like the germ of a tornado, marked the descent of the runaway box cars.

In moments of peril men sometimes do strange things. Howe fully appreciated the fact that death's clutch was well nigh on his shoulder; yet before seizing the hand brake wheel he drew his gloves from his pocket and pulled them on to shield his palms from the soot of the wheel.

Faster and faster the heavy coach sped down the incline. Not a mile below the station there was a sharp curve; he must pull the coach down before it rounded that turn, or it might go into the ditch after all, and without help from the runaway.

Higher and higher rose the shriek of the latter. Suddenly the outlines of the end of the first box car pushed its way through the cloud of smoke and dust.

Howe saw that every living soul had left the station platform, and that from the further side of the train the frightened passengers were pouring like ants from their chambers. But half could not escape before the dynamite cars reached the Usane station.

These thoughts, and many others,

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floated through Malcolm Howe's brain; but underneath them all was the appreciation of his own individual peril, and of the fact that the car he was on would probably either jump the track, or be rammed by the runaway—in either case his own "finish" seemed inevitable.

Being a Scot, however, he had not lacked caution in remaining with the private car. He would have let it roll down the grade alone had he not hoped to gain something by sticking to its rear end.

In that moment while he ran down the platform to warn Mrs. Fisher and Alice out of the car, he had thought: "Here's a chance to remind Jolley I am alive. I mustn't let any opportunity go by."

Jolley had said that the man under him who did not force himself to the surface of affairs, was not worthy of his official attention. Howe had been two days on the payroll of the R. & A., and he determined if possible to "remind" Jolley very quickly of his presence at Usane.

He glanced once around the corner of the car for a sight of the track below. He knew that the way was clear. There had been nothing following the express east.

Gaging the distance to the sharp curve before mentioned in his single glance, he grasped the brake and began to wind it up. The shoes clutched the flanges and a pungent smoke rose from the rumbling wheels of the car.

Howe's trained muscles strained at the brake, twisting the chain up to the last possible notch. And while he felt the speed of the private car retarded, the full front of the first runaway box car broke completely from the cloud which accompanied it.

The noise of its coming drowned all other sounds. Howe saw it pass the Usane station and the motionless express on the siding, like a smoking rocket-stick.

Despite the pressure of the brake, the private car was descending the grade at a dangerous rate of speed. The breeze rushed past Howe in a perfect hurricane. He realized that there was still a big chance of the car jumping the track at the curve, after all.

But he was near upon the spot now. And, pursuing him like a threatening demon, the smoke-enshrouded string of box cars plunged on behind.

The track was laid almost on a level just at the bend. It was deep in the woods, without a human habitation—without even a tool shed or water tank—in sight.

If there was to be a grand smash-up, no place on the road would better suit the railroad company. If the dynamite exploded, less harm to the company's property would result than almost anywhere else on the mountainside.

Howe knew when his own car was about to take the curve, and he released the brake again. The forward trucks swerved, and the coach groaned on its springs.

The young man would have taken his oath afterward that the car rounded the bend on its outer wheels—that the flanges of the inner wheels did not touch the rail at all. But however that might be, the manager's private coach did not jump the track.

Released from the hold-back of the brake, the heavy car sprang forward. The next few seconds meant much to Malcolm Howe. It was not merely a question of getting the car itself out of the zone of danger; his own life hung in the balance.

He knew the runaway would never round that curve. But would his own car roll far enough beyond the bend to escape the shock of the explosion that was bound to result when the box cars plunged down the embankment and into the trees below?

For several pulsating seconds the forest shut out Howe's view of the runaway. It seemed to him that the private car was feeling the level track—that it was slowing down.

Then, roaring out of the tunnel between the walls of the thick wood, like some ravening monster leaping after its prey, came the runaway.

The forward trucks of the first box car struck the curve. The truck-boxes had ignited and smoke and flames spread out fan-shaped on either side of the bounding cars.

It seemed to the excited Howe as though the front of the runaway was

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actually upon him, and he shrank against the door of the private car.

He saw the flaming wheels leave the parallel rails. Like an athlete making a long distance jump, the box cars flew through the air, over the edge of the embankment, which was here quite twenty-feet in height, and the next breath he was deafened by the crash of the wreck amid the trees in the gulley below!

This momentary crash, however, was drowned by an explosion which rocked the mountainside. The door behind Howe was forced inward, and he was fairly blown half way down the corridor of the rocking car, falling flat upon his back.

But the coach did not leave the track, nor was it battered by the rain of timber and twisted ironwork which began instantly to shower through the trees. The private car had run beyond the falling débris.

It was fully a minute before the young man could rise, however. He staggered out upon the platform. Smoke and flame filled the right of way just at the bend, and he saw tall trees toppling and falling with resonant crashes in the gulley where the explosion had taken place.

Howe seized the brake wheel again and wound up the chain tightly. The private car had not struck the next "dip," and with complaining wheels came to a full stop within a few rods.

Howe leaped out and ran back along the line. The smoke was rising, revealing the road-bed over which the fallen débris was thickly scattered. A great excavation was torn in the embankment, and over this hole the bare rails at the curve were twisted into spirals, the ties still spiked to them.

In the gulley where the four cars had landed in a heap, there was a crackling fire which blazed fiercely, threatening the surrounding forest with a sweeping conflagration.

The shock of the explosion had torn the cars to bits. Scarcely two planks hung together, and the iron work had become mere junk. The side hill looked as though a landslide had taken place.

Fortunately, the telegraph poles had been on the upper side of the curve and the wires were unbroken. Hours of delay were certain, but already Howe distinguished the throb and clatter of a descending locomotive, and in five minutes it stopped at the curve.

The engine attached to the freight causing all the trouble had followed the runaway down the line, picking up some extra men at Usane. These set to work at once to do what they could to clear the débris from the tracks and extinguished the fire, and Howe placed one as a guard over the manager's private car.

He rode back upon the freight engine and reported the exact state of affairs to Robinson, who repeated it not only to the repair crews both east and west, but to the manager himself at Racine.

"You'll make a hit all right with O. B. Jolley," Robinson declared. "Miss Alice Fisher sent over to ask who you were. There, see her at the window yonder looking at you? You're strictly in it, old man, with the high muck-a-mucks."

But Howe only smiled at the pretty girl at the window of the rear car of the express as that train pulled out upon the main line to continue its delayed journey.

CHAPTER V.

IN HOBGOBLIN LAND.

A WEEK later an official letter, signed by the secretary of the board of directors, reached the new agent at Usane, thanking him for his work that afternoon. His coolness and self-possession had undoubtedly struck the keynote for all hands. Without his suggestion the driver of the express might have failed in his duty.

But before that a characteristic note from the general manager caused Malcolm Howe considerable amusement. It was written in a scrawly hand that, somehow, seemed to completely fit Howe's idea of Jolley's temperament.

"I reckon you won't get lost out Usane way," it said. "Thank you for saving that car; it cost me good money.

"But I'm sorry to state that there seems to be another count against you. That comes of being a foreigner, I sup-

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pose It was bad enough to have Grosmith call you a lord; now it seems that you 'look like a young god.' That's throwing the gaff pretty thick, as we say in this part of the country; but it is the actual statement of a certain young lady who likewise declares she must meet you, even if she has to take a trip back to Usane for that particular purpose.

"By the way, you seemed to take on the godlike appearance while you were standing on that rear platform, sailing down the grade ahead of the runaway. I'll bet a dollar you looked frowsy and scared. But there's no accounting for the imagination of a female of the impressionist school."

Then he added a word seriously regarding the saving of his sister and niece from the fright of that awful ride which Howe took alone—a word that the young man treasured far more than he did the formal thanks of the directors.

Robinson, the retiring agent, repeated his statement that Howe had "made a hit, all right," when he shook hands with the Scot on his own departure from Usane some days later.

"I don't know what you can do to keep the good work up," he said in his familiar way. "Maybe you'd better go out gunning for the phantom flier, or something like that. The agent who can 'keep in the public eye' at a station like this—huh!"

He boarded an east-bound train, and while he waved a friendly hand to Howe, shook his other fist at the town. And the Scot couldn't blame him. Usane was the limit!

But the young fellow got things to running quite to his taste in short order. His operator, who slept in the station at night, was not a half bad sort, and the new agent could trust affairs to him if he liked.

First, however, Howe stuck to the station and hammered at a "cut off" instrument all his spare time until he became a better key-pounder. Then, when he improved in telegraphing to his satisfaction, and knew the train-schedule perfectly, and had his duties systematized, he found much time hanging heavily on his hands.

So he found relaxation with his gun His bump of location had been well developed in wandering over his Highland hills in all sorts of weather. The foothills of the Sierra Grande had few terrors for him.

Time quickly husked the shell of the tenderfoot from him, and he confidently wandered abroad with his gun in search of such game as his native hills never sheltered. Unlike the departed Robinson, he found the agency at Usane not so bad, after all.

He divided the night shift with the operator at times, thereby getting an afternoon off now and then. The operator admitted having a girl down at Valley Station whom "he was soft on"—to use his own expressive term—and he was glad to buy a Sunday night off now and then at big interest.

So it was that Malcolm Howe began to see a good bit of that side of the Sierra Grande range for some dozen miles both ways from Usane. At first he took a shiftless young "cow-puncher" for guide; later he trusted to his own instinct to bring him back safely from these exploring trips.

And it therefore happened that, just at sun-down one evening, he began to gather a few twigs for a small fire in the lee of a rock-heap far down the mountainside and considerably south of the line of the Racine & Alton division.

Near at hand was a deep pool formed by a mountan brook which dripped from a high ledge. The brook later meandered through the valley below and joined its clear waters with those of the muddy Waukane.

Beside the pool he had found recent marks of deer. It was a drinking place, and Howe determined to get a shot by torchlight if necessary, day having vouchsafed him no sight of the game he was after.

Trees were scarce on these barrens, however. Little but gray boulders showed up against the purple darkness of the mountain range behind him. When his fire was crackling, he set off to find a further supply of fuel before preparing supper.

Thus it was, being burdened with a goodly fagot of wood, and having left his rifle at his camp, he was unarmed

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when he came around the corner of a huge rock to face the unwavering muzzle of a long, rusty rifle with a weazened old man behind it.

Naturally Howe stopped, too astonished even to drop his wood. Not a sound had he heard—no warning of the approach of this singular being—and for half a minute the old fellow was as motionless and silent as a shadow.

Strange indeed he was—a gnome-like figure, with a whisp of gray beard, a wrinkled, parchment face, and two fiery eyes peering out from under the flapping brim of his old hat. His appearance, however, seemed to fit into the landscape.

These piled boulders, barren sidehills, and rock-strewn gorges could be peopled by no members of the human family. It was Hobgoblin Land, and this individual was an outguard of the gnome people who held sway over the gray wilderness!

"It's a pixy, sure enough!" muttered the Scot, with humorous appreciation of the involuntary shiver which had chilled him. Then aloud: "Well, my friend, you have the best of me."

The old fellow made no reply, but his eyes seemed still threatening and his claw-like finger trembled on the trigger.

"Don't you see I'm not armed?" exclaimed Howe, in disgust. "What do you want me to do?"

"Get out!" growled the strange old fellow, in a voice that creaked with disuse.

"Well, if you claim jurisdiction over this part of the State, I'll leave it to you. How large is you territory?"

"Get out!" repeated the stranger.

He waved the muzzle of his rifle down the hill—fortunately in a direction toward the pool and the fire Howe had built.

"Agreed!" said the Scot.

He threw down his billet of wood and marched down the hill. He felt that the strange man followed him, but he would no look around to prove the fact by visual sense.

At the camp, however, he was startled to find the fire tramped out, his knapsack, rifle, and gun gone. That was too much!

He swung around and angrily demanded what it meant—why he had been robbed, and by what right the old man claimed authority over the barren waste?

Mocking echoes thrown back from the rocks were the only answers. The old man had disappeared, and although Howe searched about the hillside for a long time—until it was dangerously dark, indeed—he found neither trace of the fellow nor of those who had robbed him and trodden out his fire.

Indeed, he showed little of his usual caution in thus rambling and shouting about the hillside. When his anger cooled he was completely "turned around"; his bump of locality did not help him, and he was forced to sit down in the shelter of a rock and, hungry and muttering, wait until the moon rose to show him the direction he should follow to reach the railroad.

When it was light enough to see to travel, he found the rugged country hard indeed. He was an hour making a mile in a direct line.

Then he reached the rails, but he recognized no landmark, and the slope of the roadbed seemed wrong—if the moon had not forgotten on this night to rise as per almanac.

"Surely I have not wandered down into the valley farther than I have ever gone before," he muttered, sighting up and down the rails in the faint moonlight. "I never saw anything like this—I declare!"

Before him, toward the north, the grade sloped upward; he knew the rails should descend in that direction. He had been following a northeasterly direction when he stumbled upon this strange bit of railroad; that was the way to the Usane station.

"What can this be? There surely is no other railroad on this side of the range. Things are getting mixed up," he muttered. "This is surely Hobgoblin Land."

But he trusted in his judgment rather than his vision, and kept on into the northeast, crossing this mysterious railroad and leaving it behind him. The way was uphill, and he finally came to a country which he thought he recognized.

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It was late in the night—long after midnight, indeed—when he finally came near the railroad with which he was familiar. He was not likely to make a mistake here, for from the high ground he looked down upon the curve and level bit of track at which the dynamite cars had left the rails and been torn to pieces.

There were no trains either up or down the grade at this hour, yet before he sighted the rails below him he thought he heard the throb of a locomotive exhaust. Surely that was the rumble of a train coming down the grade!

He hurried on through a thick wood which here intervened. The sound became more certain. What special was this going through?

At last he reached the level of the road-bed and burst through the trees. He glanced toward the curve; the track there was empty. In the other direction he gazed, and a startled cry broke from his lips.

Some distance down the track, just where the sharp grade dipped down again into the valley, he observed the train which had made the noise. And yet it did not sound like any other train passing, nor did it seem like an ordinary train in other particulars.

At first he only saw the rear end of a car, and noted that there was no light on either side. Then the train followed a bend in the road and he gained a fleeting glimpse of its side.

The locomotive seemed unoccupied; he did not notice any steam, even, rising from its shadowy stack. And the single car attached to the engine seemed quite as shadowy and ghostlike.

There was no light shining through the car windows. Yet a shimmering white radiance bathed the car. It was, indeed, all silver or white, like the moonlight itself.

In a few seconds, during which Howe did not breathe, the phantom had faded from sight, and the mysterious rumble of its wheels passed swiftly into the distance.

He was not sure that he had either seen or heard the thing.

The young man went on moodily to the Usane station. He did not care to knock up the operator at that hour, so went to bed himself in his room in the hotel.

But there he could not easily sleep. His mind went over and over again the surprising incidents of the night.

Who was the old fellow who had warned him out of the foothills of the mountain range? And who were his companions who had robbed the Scot of his gun and trampled out his fire?

Where did that railroad go? Above all, what was the phantom flier?

He knew he must have seen it. This was the Thing of which Bob Harding, of No. 60, had told Robinson. It was the ghost that had frightened the unfortunate Jimson into throwing his locomotive.

What was the phantom flier?

Howe tossed and tossed upon his hard bed. His tramp had wearied him sufficiently to bring sleep without much wooing. Yet he could only think and wonder, and start out of a doze with a new explanation, or thought, about some point of the mystery.

One of these was: "There now! There's a point I forgot. Those rails I found were very rusty. They were not like rails that are used day in and day out. That's an unused bit of railroad track I came across.

"Where does it go to—or come from? Ah, the old coal mines! Of course. What a ninny I was not to think of that."

And then he lay back in much satisfaction and went finally to sleep, forgetting that he had solved only the least important of the problems which had disturbed him.

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER AND A REPORT.

"Moon lunacy" is more common than we sometimes fancy. There are few men of thirty years who have not suffered from it in some form or other.

And Malcolm Howe was inclined, that next morning, to put down much of his experience of the night to "moonlight effect."

"That old codger who drove me out of his bailiwick" (it will be noticed that

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the Scot had picked up not a few Americanisms during these weeks he had spent in the West), "was real enough. And there was something exceedingly realistic about his friends who robbed me," the young man added with much disgust.

"I don't think I have found a tribe of dwarfs, or gnomes, or pixies, in this range, such as they say old Rip Van Winkle did in some other of these American mountains. When it comes to the phantom flier, though——

"Well, I just don't believe I saw any train at all!"

This was after he had resumed his duties at the station, relieving the operator, who finished his sleep in his boarding-house along the street somewhere. Howe very carefully examined the train-sheet which he and his assistant kept, to make sure that no special had gone down the grade during the night.

"I dreamed that," he declared.

But he made inquiries regarding the old fellow who had held him up, finding time during the forenoon to call in a lackadaisical fellow who posed as sheriff and report to this official the fact that he had been robbed in the woods. The satisfaction he obtained, being a tenderfoot, was small indeed.

"Wal, Mr. Howe, ye'll l'arn ter keep yer weapon handy another time, I reckon," was the sheriff's comment.

"But see here," began Howe hotly, "isn't there any law in this place? Aren't you going to do anything about it?"

"Sure! I'll go out right now with the boys an' arrest him."

"Arrest *who?*"

The sheriff winked one eye.

"That's it," he said. "You swear out a warrant ag'in' th' feller, an' I'll rope him—sure pop!"

"But I don't know him."

"Nor me, nuther."

"Arrest that old fellow who held me up. He'll know," said Howe.

"Oh, no; that wouldn't never do," said the sheriff, shaking his head. "I know who the old chap is. He's harmless enough," and he tapped his forehead suggestively.

"Harmless!"

"Sure. He's sort of a hermit up there. Been in them parts for years. Don't like to be disturbed."

"But either he or his friends went through my knapsack and took my gun. And that gun cost me forty pounds."

"Pound o' what?" asked the sheriff in surprise.

"Two hundred dollars, I mean," said Howe, regretting the slip of the tongue.

"Why didn't ye say so?" demanded the Western official suspiciously. "I don't know nothin' erbout yer foreign money."

"But don't you intend to do anything?" cried Howe with exasperation.

"Dunno what I can do, 'nless you'll swear out a warrant again somebody."

"I'll get one out for that old hermit, then."

"I wouldn't. The boys might not like it. They all know him, and he's harmless, I tell ye.

"He never took yer gun, Mr. Howe. Like enough some o' these ornery dogs 'round yere spotted your weepon and follered ye for it. Don't never let your weepon out o' reach when ye're foolin' around in these hills. It hain't healthy."

Howe saw that he could expect no help from this source; he went no further with the sheriff. He did not wish to antagonize the cattle interests of the country, and Bulger was a cattle man and was put in office by cowboy votes.

But the story of his loss, and his helplessness, was spread abroad before noontime, for at the hotel during dinner the diners were more than usually merry at the young Scot's expense.

Howe had afforded them much amusement the first time he had eaten in the place by calling for fresh milk, or cream, for his coffee. Milk in a cow town! Other than the condensed variety it is hard to find, even on the ranches where there are thousands of head of cattle. It is beneath a cowboy to milk a cow.

After Howe began to come to the hotel table it was the usual program for some humorist in "chaps" and a flannel shirt to pick up a newspaper, hold it like a dinner menu, and order his meal from it in the lordly style supposed to be the proper thing in civilized communities.

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"Me'n' his ludship'll have beef-all-over-mud, ister cocktails, an' frogslegs a la chignons," he would tell the grinning waiter.

"You'll have boiled dog, a la paloosa, same's us'al," rejoined a companion, spearing a chunk of fat boiled beef from the platter. "His ludship'll hafter go gunnin' again before we git any delicacies at this table," and the laugh which followed, and the glances cast in Howe's direction, were unmistakable.

But the Scot kept his temper. He represented the railroad, and he was not one to break the peace. Besides, it would have given the crowd too much pleasure had he shown that their guying troubled him.

He consulted with his operator, who had lived all his life in the country, regarding the matter of the lost gun.

"You can't do a thing, Mr. Howe," said that individual. "If somebody picked your gun up as a joke, it'll come back to you in time. If it was stolen, why—let it go!

"No use troubling Bulger. He can't do anything for you. He depends on the thieves and rustlers of the county to help elect him, any way.

"Besides, like enough you ran against some of Silver Jack's boys, and you got off easily with only the loss of your gun."

"I've heard something of Silver Jack. Robinson spoke of him."

"He's a 'bad man,' sure as you live. I've seen him ride up here and race horses through the town when there was a posse sworn in to arrest him drinking in the San Dago saloon. They never heered him, nohow," declared the operator, dropping into the vernacular.

"What lawlessness!"

"Well, it is, I suppose. But Silver Jack—whoever he *is*—is a hard man to round up. Always has his gang with him."

"Can't they catch him alone?"

"Don't know who he is. Nobody ever saw his face, they say. Wears a mask with silver straps to hold it on—like a baseball mask—when he appears in public. I suppose the crowd that runs with him, and shares the loot, know him; but they're not telling the authorities, you bet!"

"And you think that old fellow who drove me out of the hills yonder was one of his men?"

"No. I know who he is," declared the operator. "Guess Bulger is right about him; he's harmless. Lives up somewhere near the old coal mines. The only way is to keep out of that part of the country. There's just as much game elsewhere, and nobody to bother."

This was good advice, and Howe realized it. But he hated to let his fine gun go. He would have offered a reward "and no questions asked" for its return, only he did not know how the Usane community would take it.

Usane was a pretty dead place just now; but before many weeks it would be full of a roaring mob of cowboys; some shipping their steers for the Eastern markets; others spending the money they had earned during the season on the ranges.

Howe had sent word throughout the country that he would supply cars in any quantity for those who desired to ship from the side track at Usane, and so save either a long drive or the changing from the river scows to the other railroad further north. He desired to make the Usane shipments as large as possible.

"That's the only way I have of reminding Jolley and the directors that they have a live man here," the young fellow told himself. "Grosmith's ill turn has quite buried me in this cursed wilderness. But I'll turn it to account, and perhaps surprise some of them yet.

"I suppose Grosmith thought I had come over here to *play* at being a railroad man. I'll show him I've some 'grit in my craw.' And if I'm to make Usane's freight account surprise the directors of the R. & A., I must not antagonize these fellows."

Oddly enough, about this time Howe received a letter, forwarded from several points where he had stopped on his way West, the seal of which was a nicely woven "H. G."

Two months before he would have welcomed this with considerable more enthusiasm than he now felt. "Sharp is ingratitude's tooth," he might have

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quoted. He had done much to make delightful the visit of the Grosmiths to Scotland.

MY DEAR MR. MALCOLM HOWE:

You don't know how disappointed I was to learn that you have "really and truly" been in New York while I was away from home. Father was so busy that he forgot to mention it to me when I returned, and it is quite by accident that I learn the heir to the old Earl of Karmack was in the city and had graced New York society "at the tag end of the season" for a week or ten days.

I am terribly disappointed, for although I don't care a picayune for the heir of the Earl of Karmack, I haven't forgotten those rambles in the Scotch mist, the golf, and my friend, Malcolm Howe. I tell you, I took old dad to task for his neglect. You see, a business man on a vacation, and the same man "neck-deep" in his work, are quite different.

"I had noticed that," muttered Howe as he read, smiling grimly.

Dad said he remembered you came, and that he gave you letters to several business associates. He "believes you thought some of taking up railroading." I could have scalped him—only he is too bald for that operation.

But you must not stay in the West long enough to undergo any scalping yourself. I suppose you find the country terribly wild and woolly. I hope to see you in town again by the time people get home and the theaters open.

Oh, father says he is in a position to do something for you on his own road now. He sends his regards, and hopes to see you at his table when you come East.

Sincerely your friend,
HARRIET GROSMITH.

"Well, she is sincere, I hope," thought the young Scot. "But the old man—well, *what* has changed him so suddenly? This letter is dated a month back. Let—me—see."

Here he fished out an English paper from his desk and noted that the date was two weeks earlier than that on Hattie Grosmith's letter. And in this paper was a marked paragraph which mentioned the sudden death of Lord Norman, the Earl of Karmack's only son.

Now, Norman and Howe were cousins, and the young lord's demise left Howe—well, a "possible" heir to Karmack.

"But I reckon the 'possible heir' will keep on at Usane for a while," he thought. "I don't propose to be tolled back to New York to be turned down again by President Grosmith. The earl may change his mind half a dozen times before he dies, and I am afraid the adoption of another heir to Karmack than myself would make a good bit of difference to Grosmith, if not to Miss Hattie."

In fact, he felt that the letter was only likely to engage his mind when it should be completely free for other things. He was planning a campaign which he proposed should make him known to the officials of the Racine & Alton division, and he really hadn't been deeply enough in love with Hattie Grosmith for her letter to unfit him for continuing with his scheme.

It was about this time that Howe made up his famous report and sent it in to headquarters. There were no two ways about it; it showed ignorance and a lack of appreciation as to the fitness of a mere mountain station agent advising the board of directors of a corporation like the R. & A.

It made O. B. Jolley chuckle, and anything that amused him he was inclined to share with the rest of the world. The directors bore with their general manager's jokes; but they were inclined to show "Mr. Howe, station master, Usane" that it was first his business to keep his place. Four foolscap pages of closely written report—humph!

"I admit, gentlemen," said the general manager, still chuckling, "that it has its elements of humor. Mr. Howe has failed to grasp the idea of brevity so neatly exemplified in the report of the Irish wrecking boss who was once called down for verbosity, and thereafter in reporting his duty performed he wrote:

Off again—
On again—
Home again—
Finnegan.

But there are some good points in this screed he has sent in."

"But, Jolley," exclaimed one disgusted director, "the fool asks for four hundred cars next month. There was

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never more than fifty cars used at Usane in thirty days since the world began!"

"He evidently expects bigger shipments," said Jolley doubtfully.

"He wants to tie up the whole road—self-important little bantam!" snapped another. "What's this I hear about his being an Englishman—or Irishman——"

"Scot," murmured Jolley.

"Huh, Scotch lord, or something? Somebody on the N. & N. W. P. was joking me about having a live lord on our payroll."

"Guess that doesn't hurt him," said Jolley comfortably. "*He* hasn't said he was a lord."

"Well, it strikes me that he's setting himself up for a little tin god over there at Usane, and he wants knocking off his perch," growled the first speaker. "Just squash him, Jacobson."

And so the secretary of the board wrote Howe a very tart letter; only its tartness was lost on Howe because with it came a personal note from O. B. Jolley telling him to "go ahead."

"Get all the freight you can. They don't believe that you know what you're about. I do," wrote the general manager. "If you can get four hundred carloads of steers, I'll find the cars. And if necessary, we'll put in a longer siding at Usane. Should be one there, any way. The day of that breakaway when you saved my car showed that."

So Malcolm Howe was encouraged and forgot the possibility of Grosmith finding him something to do on the New York & Mohawk Valley road. He had his hands full right here at Usane.

CHAPTER VII.

A HOLD-UP AT CLOSE RANGE.

And it must not be supposed that the young Scot sat in the tiny office of the Usane Station and dreamed all this freight scheme out. Neither the railroad directors nor Jolley himself realized of what infinite pains the new agent was capable.

North of Usane, in the Waukane Valley, was good pasture; many ranches dotted the territory.

The nearest cattlemen had been in the habit of shipping their stock from the short siding at Usane. The others drove their herds miles down the river to Skales Landing, shipped aboard the scows as previously mentioned, and then transferred the stock to the B. & S. F. All this trade Howe believed could be obtained for the R. & A. if the right effort was put forth.

Even before the wonderful report went up to the directors' meeting at Racine, Howe had arranged with the proprietor of the Sierra Grande House, who was something of a horse trader and more of a wag, to find him a cow pony and "outfit."

"And mind," said the Scot in good humor, "as I am a tenderfoot, don't get me a bucking horse."

"Don't you fret your gizzard," declared Homstreck solemnly. "Wouldn't play any such stale joke as *that* on you, Mr. Howe."

When he found the horse it seemed all that one could expect of a cow pony—chunky of build, legs like a dancing master's; a buckskin with black points. Howe liked the look of the creature; but he did not like the appearance of the crowd that silently assembled to see him mount for the first time in the shed-yard behind the hotel.

In spite of Homstreck's solemn assertion, Howe was certain that the pony had some trick which was expected to bring the tenderfoot to shame.

The horse really was not wicked, however; its eye was as calm as a quiet pool, and with no guile in its depths. But it had been trained by its former owner, a cow puncher addicted to much "showing off," to start on a dead run the instant he felt the weight of his rider in the saddle.

And the way the beast set off from the riding block with Howe on his back was, in the words of Homstreck, "a caution to cats." Howe had not been unused to horseback riding in Scotland, however, and although he made a figure for laughter as the horse raced through "Main Street" toward the open country, he stuck like a burr to his seat, and after a while managed to handle the buckskin very nicely.

The joke fell rather flat, after all;

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Homestreck "stood licker" to the boys as an acknowledgment of his own defeat; and Howe quickly taught the cow pony what was expected of him. He was a sound bit of horseflesh, and for three weeks he carried his new master over many miles of country, from ranch to ranch.

"They'll never thank you for the trouble you're taking, Mr. Howe," declared his operator, who understood what his superior was trying to do. "These corporations never do. They'll take the increased freight and consider that the Almighty is the only one to be thanked—and then they'll forget to do that!"

"I won't let 'em forget me," was Howe's dogged reply.

The Usane agent saw not only the ranch owners who were in the habit of shipping their stock from Usane, but cattlemen up the valley who had never done so.

Some saw the benefit they would derive from shipping direct on the cars instead of reshipping from the river scows. But the corral beside the Usane siding was small, and some of the ranchmen even went so far as to declare that Usane "wasn't honest."

"Too many rustlers and ne'er-do-wells up there on the ridge," they said. "You get a sheriff that's got backbone enough to clean out the town and drive the rustlers away, and we'll think of shipping our stock by the R. & A."

These opinions Howe dutifully passed on to the headquarters of the road, and was sneered at (only he didn't know it) for his pains. When he finally asked for seventy-five cars early in the month to handle one shipment, he brought a deluge of wrath down upon his devoted head.

Seventy-five cars in one day! What did he mean? Who was he to ask for seventy-five cars in one day? Did he want to tie up the whole road?

These and other questions rattled from the telegraph sounder. Howe coolly repeated his request to Jolley himself. He got the cars—in three sections and with two mogul engines to each section.

By sending one section out from Racine, and bringing the other two from Alton, the despatcher managed to handle them so as not to hold back the passenger trains; but the freight service was knocked into a cocked hat.

When the long train, with its boxes crowded with frightened and staring cattle, passed through the Racine yard, the headquarters force began to believe that the Usane agent knew what he was about.

"Keep at it!" was O. B. Jolley's message to his protégé.

And Howe did so. All that month nothing happened on the R. & A. division of so much moment as the cattle shipments at Usane—not even the "hold-up" near the Valley Station of the night express, bound east.

This last incident might have been of greater importance had the robbers made a bigger haul. But about all the gang got away with was the engineer's gold repeater and a small iron box full of steel filings that the express agent had carefully prepared for them.

The box of coined gold of which the gang had somehow got wind was safely hidden among the baggageman's trunks.

"For once Silver Jack was fooled—and fooled bad!" declared Perkins, the Usane operator, in high glee.

But he said this privately to Howe. Silver Jack was a subject tabooed at the Sierra Grande House table; the cattlemen and cow-punchers who congregated there never mentioned him.

There was one point about this abortive hold-up that vastly interested the young station agent. One of the train hands happened to be in Usane a few days after, and Howe received from him a vivid account of the stopping of the night express, called on the train-sheet "Number 130."

"You know, Mr. Howe, we always come through that cut this side of Valley Station at reduced speed. There is danger of a slide or of a boulder dropping across the track," he said.

"I was forward in the smoker, and I went out on the platform when we came to the cut. It's just as well to be near the brake wheel at such a time, for the driver might whistle for the hand-brakes. His air might not work right, you know.

"Well, I was pretty near thrown off

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when the shoes clinched the wheels. Cassidy socked the air to her in good shape, now I tell you. He saw a pile of ties and bigger timbers in front of the pilot, with several of them standing up straight and braced. Just managed to stop her in time.

"I saw the crowd come out of the brush and tackle the express car and hold the engineer and fireman in the tender. One big feller with a mask poked a gun in *my* face, too. There was enough of them so that one robber stood between each two cars, and with a gun in either hand held the passengers in the coaches.

"But when they sneaked with that safe—that was a good joke on 'em, too!—they didn't take to the woods. They went up the track—I saw 'em going. And while we were clearing away the ties and timber I'll take my Bible oath I heard a locomotive exhaust ahead of us, and after that the rumble of a train.

"Can't tell me! Some said it was a freight coming up behind us; but I know better. Heard that train start as plain as day. Then it rumbled away into the distance. Those road-agents had a locomotive and a car or two—sure thing!"

"But where did it go to? You didn't overtake it afterward?"

"No," and the brakeman scratched his head. "It gets by me! But they escaped on a train of some kind, just the same."

Howe thought of the mysterious train he had seen—or dreamed he saw—the night he had lost his way in the foothills. There must be, after all, some foundation for the general belief in the phantom flier. Yet what was it, who worked it, and where did it disappear to so mysteriously?

It was during the height of the cattle shipments that Malcolm Howe received his second letter from Hattie Grosmith.

At first he had hesitated about answering her delayed epistle. Her father's treatment of him had made him suspicious of the girl as well; but finally he replied, being careful to say little regarding his position with the R. & A., but politely refusing her father's intimated offer on his own road.

One paragraph in her second letter quickened Howe's pulse.

"Father thinks of taking a trip West to meet certain people and look over lines of road in which he has important holdings. If he does this, I shall make up a party of friends for the trip, too. It is fun to travel in a private car and be the guests of railroad men, I can tell you. Perhaps we shall see you."

Howe felt like exclaiming: "Not if I see you first, you won't!" for he felt that he did not care to have the Grosmiths know that he was working for the R. & A. division as the agent of a mountain station.

There was a good deal of bustle in Usane for two or three weeks. Gang after gang of cowboys came to town, with or without their herds, and the saloons, dance halls, and worse "joints," were noisy and filled to overflowing by night and day.

The cattlemen sent their foremen and more trustworthy herders East with the cattle—to Kansas City or Chicago. The extra men were paid off at Usane, and proceeded at once to spend their wages before going back to the ranges. They were a wild and reckless lot.

Howe was busy night and day. No more trips into the wilderness for him now. He never left the station, excepting for meals, turning the operator himself out of his cot bed and sleeping beside the safe.

For that safe had suddenly become an object of importance. As the cattle went through, the ranchmen came to him, and paid their freight bills in hard cash for the most part.

Howe was instructed to await the coming of the paymaster before turning over his money and accounts; and before the end of the month several thousand dollars was locked in the iron box—more money, in fact, than had ever before reposed there.

Howe would have suggested to headquarters that the money be sent in from time to time; but the R. & A. was bound by red tape, and he had already made enough suggestions to the main office.

Homstreck, the tavern keeper, remarked: "Little old Usane is a-gettin'

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pretty lively just about now. This is the time we fellers make our money."

But to Howe's mind, Perkins sized the conditions up exactly: "It's like a big caldron of hell's broth—and it'll be that way till these cow-punchers and rustlers git out o' town."

Bulger, the sheriff, swaggered about in the public eye, but the most evil of the transient population were plainly not afraid of the law, as represented by Bulger.

One evening a band of seemingly drunken cowboys raced their ponies through the streets, shooting recklessly, roping stray dogs, and driving everybody to cover.

The dance halls were already in full swing with the night crowd, the rickety pianos and squeaky fiddles sounding unharmoniously from within. Nobody inside seemed to consider it worth while—or safe—to come out. The cowboys had things all their own way.

Howe had sent Perkins home, that the operator might get some sleep. He went to the window when the shooting began, and in an instant two panes of glass, one at either side of his head, were smashed.

He accepted the warning and went back into the office, which looked out only on the station platform.

The wild yells and intermittent snapping of the cowboys' guns moved away from the station. But oddly enough, nobody came out of the hotel, or from the shacks near the track.

When the disturbance began there had been several loiterers about the station. These had disappeared with the quietness of shadows.

"Talk about law and order!" muttered Howe, on whom these things rasped. "I wonder if an honest sheriff could really make this place anything but the mouth of the pit it is!"

And then he heard a quiet step behind him, and turned to see who had entered the station. The shouts and pistol shots were far up the street now; but the vicinity of the station seemed uninhabited.

A smoky hanging lamp threw its beams over the "waiting-room." Through this apartment the step came, and suddenly a tall figure appeared in the doorway—a figure in black clothes, well dressed feet, gloved hands, and a face shrouded in a cloth mask which fell below the chin and was kept in place by plain bands of what Howe supposed must be silver, from what he had heard of the man.

"Silver Jack!" the agent muttered.

The gloved hand of the desperado held a pocket-pistol of small caliber but deadly significance. He was a tall man, of ample proportions; but when he spoke it was with an accent of cultivation as well as with surprise.

"Judas Priest!" the desperado exclaimed. "It's *you*, is it?"

"I'm sorry to say it is," returned Howe.

His mind was working rapidly. Had he ever seen this fellow before? Surely not! Yet Silver Jack had spoken as though the agent's identity was known to him.

"That's enough, pard!" exclaimed the masked man in a moment, and dropping into rough speech that was surely assumed. "Don't talk. I like to see men *do* things. I ain't got more'n a week to stay here. Open that safe!"

"Certainly," responded Howe politely.

"Armed?" snapped the road agent.

Howe shook his head; but the man stepped nearer and slapped Howe's pockets before he would let him rise. Then he stood in front of the telegraph instrument while the agent went to the safe.

"Be quick, now!" exclaimed Silver Jack. "I'd just as soon shoot as not—if you're slow, I mean."

But Howe had no intention of being slow. It is all very well to be brave in the face of danger. That's when a man has at least a chance for his life.

But Silver Jack was altogether too near him to miss if he fired. If Howe turned upon him he would be shot down before he could clutch him. And another pistol shot more or less would never be noticed to-night.

He might have detained the robber by refusing to open the safe. But Howe's life was as sweet to him as the next man's.

It flashed through his mind that there was method in the madness of

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that wild mob of cowboys riding up and down Usane's main street. It was meant to cover this very robbery.

There was nothing to be hoped from Bulger. He could not telegraph for help; nor would there be a train along for two or three hours.

If he refused to open the safe he would merely be shot down for his pains, and then the robbers would doubtless blow the thing apart and get the money any way.

So he stooped before the door and seized the knob.

"Don't fiddle too long there, mister!" growled the man behind him, and Howe felt the muzzle of the revolver pushed against the back of his neck.

(To be continued.)

A MARRIAGE FOR MONEY.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

How three Americans came to consort with a descendant of the Incas and a princess of the cave.

IT does seem at least strange that out of a party of three, consisting of an author, an artist, and a mere common man, the common man should have it fall to his lot to relate this somewhat remarkable but none the less veritable tale.

Briggs was the artist.

There may seem to be something plebeian about the mere name Briggs. But when he wrote it in full, Gustavus Montclair Briggs, one simply knew he was in the presence of a somebody.

Vitz was the author.

Now, the ways of authors are past understanding. Vitz would write short stories that simply made you scream with laughter with the humor of them. But Vitz himself was as solemn, dull, and uninteresting as a hunk of mud.

My name was Jones, and I was a common, ordinary man. That is, I furnished the necessary money, common sense, and judgment which made it possible for the two men of genius to travel in the Andes.

We were camped about a hundred miles from Lake Titicaca.

The scenery was incomparably beautiful. The air, though it was midsummer, and the climate in the lowlands unbearable, was cool and bracing. There is no air like the air of the Andes.

Picture the scene.

Briggs was sprawling in all sorts of shapes, with a notebook on his lap, drawing the outlines of what was some day, according to Briggs, to be his masterpiece. Vitz was writing. I never saw Vitz when he wasn't writing.

If Vitz sold all he wrote, and Briggs sold all he painted, a mere common man like myself wouldn't have to put up good money to give them a vacation. But then, they were relations of mine, and every ordinary man knows what it is to have relatives with genius.

As for me, while Briggs drew and Vitz wrote, I cooked the supper.

I had shot the supper to begin with, and was not proud of it. It was a mountain lion or puma or some such miserable beast—none of us knew the name of anything we saw—and the flesh was just a little less tough than the soles of the stout boots I wore. But I was cooking it.

"Smells good!" said Vitz.

"Um! I say, Vitz, what would we do without Jones?"

I flapped a steak of wild beast over on the frying-pan, but did not reply to the witticism of Briggs.

I knew what they would do without Jones. Go broke and hungry.

"Know what I'd like?" asked Briggs.

"Porterhouse steak and mushrooms," said Vitz.

"Oyster cocktail," I put in.

"All material. What I want is a real Inca to make a painting of."

"Imagine yourself back four hundred years. That's the only way," said Vitz.

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Briggs sniffed the invigorating air.

"Do you know, I don't believe people die up here?"

"I guess not," rejoined Vitz. "I haven't seen anybody to die. We inhabit, at the present time, the Andes."

"This steak is almost done," I said. "Vitz, get the biscuits, and you, Briggs, stop your everlasting drawing and make some coffee."

"Yes, sure," answered Briggs.

Having at last got the meal ready, I spread a cloth on the ground, and we sat around it to eat. There was a crackling of leaves and bushes.

"What's that?" asked Vitz. "Get your gun, Jones. You are the best shot."

I quickly rose to my feet, and grasping my rifle, which I always kept handy, I aimed toward the sound. I expected a puma to emerge from the thicket.

Imagine my surprise, however, when I saw, timidly coming from among the trees, a girl.

She could not have been more than fifteen, yet she was tall and well formed, and not far from being pretty, notwithstanding the color of her skin.

"Beg pardon," I said. "I did not intend to shoot."

"No," said Briggs. "He was just cleaning his gun."

The girl was evidently frightened. She stood still, staring at us, and wringing her hands in a helpless sort of terror.

It was at once evident that she did not understand a word that was said. I tried her in Spanish.

"You need not fear us," I assured her. "We are friends. We are simply here for pleasure, and would not harm you."

She seemed to breathe easier, but did not leave. She looked at me in a mute appeal, and it occurred to me that perhaps she had come there for the purpose of seeing us.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" I asked in Spanish.

"Yes, hit it up in Dago," said Vitz.

The girl seemed to leap at the vein of sympathetic feeling in my voice.

"Pardon, señor," she said. "Is there one among you with the science of medicine?"

"Medicine! No, there is not a physician here. We have some little skill, I suppose, as all men have. What is the trouble? Are you ill?"

"No, but the Ancient One is."

"The Ancient One? What does that mean? Who are you?"

"I am Atla. The Ancient One is Axlacta. He is very old."

"Is he your father?"

"No."

"Is he your grandfather?"

"No."

"Well, have you a father?"

"No."

"Well, tell me something about yourself. Where do you live?"

"In the Inca's cave."

I seemed to feel that I had fallen upon a romance. It was even better, as it started out, than any of the trash that Vitz wrote or Briggs painted.

"You live in the Inca's cave! Does the Ancient One live there also?"

"Yes, he is the priest of the gold."

"What the deuce is all this palaver about?" asked Briggs. "What does the girl say, Jones?"

"She says she lives in the Inca's cave with the Ancient One, who is the priest of the gold."

"Holy smoke!"

"Great Scott!"

The two unlimbered and rose to their feet. The girl seemed uneasy.

"She's a picture!" declared Briggs.

"I'll write her up," answered Vitz.

"But this Ancient One, whoever he may be, is ill. Vitz, you know something about medicine; let's go see him."

"In a cave! Look out for traps."

"Nonsense! What would a man and girl want to trap us for? I think it is safe to go."

"Sure," said Briggs. "I'll take a book along and draw the Ancient One. I wanted something like that."

"Señorita," I said to the girl, "guide us to the side of the sick man. We will do all we can."

She bowed her thanks and turned. We paid no heed to our camp, but followed her.

It was less than a quarter of a mile she led us, and when she stopped I looked in vain for any sign of a habi-

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tation. But, hidden by rocks and trees, there was a small opening in the side of the mountain.

"Enter without fear," said the girl. "Only the Ancient One is here."

We followed her through the opening. Vitz was the tallest of the three, and had to stoop.

We found ourselves in a long, narrow passage, in which stones of varying sizes were strewn about promiscuously. It was uninviting and rough.

But the girl, light and graceful as a queen of our own ball-rooms, led us over and around the rocks, and again we came to a small opening.

"I feel as if I was a piece of putty in a bean-shooter," remarked Vitz.

"You're putty, all right," added Briggs.

The girl put out her arm as though to push back a curtain and we saw the light of an oil lamp. We followed her inside, and then stood, three dolts with no other emotion than absolute and paralyzing astonishment.

We were evidently in a cave, since we had entered from the mountainside. But there was nothing within sight that even suggested such a place.

The walls were hung with the most magnificent tapestries, the looms of which were still centuries ago, fabrics embroidered in choicest art with the mystic emblems of the Aztecs.

There were perhaps a hundred of these tapestries, any single one of which was worth a thousand dollars.

Piles of hideous images in solid gold were stored in the corners, and golden urns and plates and vessels of various shapes almost filled the place.

"The treasure-house of a forgotten people!" gasped Vitz.

Upon a bed of skins lay what was once a man. He was alive, and from his hideous, shriveled face two burning eyes looked up at us with a soul-searching penetration.

The man was certainly very old—so old that it was impossible even to judge of his age. The young girl standing at his side was positively beautiful by comparison.

Now, I liked Briggs. But there are some things that get on the nerves of even the common, ordinary man. In the presence of Death out came his book and the iron face of the emaciated Ancient One was transferred to paper.

"What do you think of this?" asked Vitz.

"There is but one think coming," I said in my cold, practical way.

It was this cold, practical way that made it possible for Vitz and Briggs to enjoy a vacation in the Andes at my expense.

"What is it?"

"Old age. There is practically nothing to be done except make the old gentleman's last moments comfortable."

This I proceeded to do. I smoothed his pillow, I gave him water, and the keen, sparkling eyes looked up at me gratefully.

"I am very old," he said in Spanish. "Who are you? How did you find me?"

"The girl found us," I answered. Vitz was scribbling. Briggs was drawing.

"Ah! She is the princess of the cave! Listen. Men in your country do not live so long. I am very old. One hundred and ten years have I lived."

He looked it. If he had said two hundred and ten I doubt my ability to gainsay it. The leathery skin was wrinkled and tough. There was little sign of life about him except the piercing eyes and feeble voice.

"Many years ago," he went on, "the princess of Peru owned much treasure. Pizarro came. It was all over. Cruel, murderous, the Spaniards killed my people. I am the last."

"But the girl! Is she not of your people?"

"Her mother was of my people. Her father was a Spaniard."

"I say," broke in Briggs, who was always irrepressible, "is the old fellow telling you about the gold?"

"Shut up," I answered in my common, ordinary way.

"Here is the wealth of the last of the Incas," said the old man. "For seventy years have I watched over this place. The mother of Atla was the daughter of my daughter. She is a good girl. It is not that I fear to die. But of her I think."

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"What is he saying?" asked Vitz.

"He says he has for many years been the guardian of the treasure of the Incas. Now he thinks only of the girl Atla."

"Oh!"

"Listen," went on the old man. "There are three of you. I know you come from the great country to the north. You are brave men and good. In this cave there is treasure of vast value. But it belongs now to Atla. Alone, she will be seized by the government of Bolivia. This is no longer a part of Peru, my country. Which of you is not married?"

"Not one of us is married," I answered.

"Ah!"

I wondered what was going on in the old man's mind. I glanced around me. The sheen of the gold was over everything.

"There is gold—more than you see—but it is hers," continued the Ancient One.

"There!" said Briggs. "I've got him done. I'll try the girl when she—Great Scott!"

The girl had left us, and her absence had been unnoticed. She now reappeared from an inner chamber. From head to foot she was dressed in gorgeous cloth of gold. Her beauty was remarkable.

"The wealth is hers," said the old man. "I must die. I have lived long and cared for the gold. Now I leave you my last request."

Briggs was industriously drawing the girl. Vitz was scribbling away for dear life. As the only practical man in the crowd I listened.

"She needs protection, for the unbelievers of the government will make her a slave. You are young men. She is young, beautiful, good. One of you must take her for a wife."

I stood a moment, stunned by this sudden announcement. I glanced at Briggs. He had a good picture of the girl in her gorgeous robes.

"Bring the sacred book!" said the old man suddenly.

The girl darted away, and soon had a parchment in his hand.

"Swear—all!" he said.

"Come up here and take a solemn oath!" I told Vitz and Briggs.

"What is it?" asked the artist.

"One of us must marry the girl."

"Is that all?"

"No. The one who marries her gets the treasure with her."

"That's in your line, Jones," said Vitz. "Everything you touch turns to gold."

There was a gasping sound and I turned quickly.

"She—the last of the race—I leave—be men!"

A choking, then a slight rattle, and it was over. The girl was kneeling at his side.

"Is he dead?" asked Briggs.

"Yes, the Ancient One is dead," I answered.

Somehow all the levity had been driven from me. The girl rose, dry-eyed but trembling. She faced us with a look that seemed more fear than anything else.

"You did not save him!" she said.

"No, it was impossible," I answered. "He was very old, and men do not live forever. Do you know what he said about you?"

"Yes, I know," she replied.

She gathered the folds of the cloth of gold about her, and walked with the dignity of a queen into the inner chamber.

"Now this thing has got to be settled," I said. "The old man is gone. We can't leave the girl alone in this cave."

"Who the deuce suggested it?" asked Briggs.

"But—how shall we manage?"

We stood facing one another.

Vitz took a coin from his pocket. I think it was one I had loaned him.

"Let's toss," he suggested.

"Now, look here," I said angrily. "This is no farce. The man is dead. The girl needs protection. I have no reason to doubt that this wealth is hers. What shall we do with her?"

"Didn't I say toss?"

"The author has authed a statement," said Briggs. "Toss."

Briggs lost. Then as between Vitz and myself—Vitz lost.

"You marry the girl," said Vitz.

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"But there is just a slight obstacle," I said. "I am engaged to Elizabeth Munroe."

"Break it."

"Nonsense! Do try to be decent. Now——"

There was a sound outside the entrance.

I went to look. An officer and three men stood there.

"What do you want?" I asked in Spanish.

"We represent the president," said the officer. "Old Axlacta is dead. We know there is gold here, and have been waiting for him to die. There is a girl here, half Indian and half Spanish. We will take her and the gold to Sucre."

"The devil you will!" said Briggs.

Now, for an artist, Briggs was hot-headed. The officer entered the cave, and was promptly knocked down. In a moment I saw there was danger of a mix-up that would end disastrously for us.

"Stop!" I cried. "You cannot take a girl away from her husband. Even women have rights in Bolivia. This is a private residence as much as a house in Sucre."

The officer picked himself up and rubbed that portion of his swarthy face where Briggs had hit him.

"Has she a husband?"

"Certainly," I said, pointing to Briggs. "Now depart, and we will attend the burial of the old man, and report at Sucre."

I fondled a revolver as I spoke. Vitz was always impetuous, and monkeyed with his rifle.

"Go!" I said.

I always had that commanding way. They went.

"Now," I said to Briggs, "I've lied to get us out of this scrape. You've got to marry the girl."

Briggs looked at me with a cold, unfeeling stare.

"Well," he said, "what the devil did you think I was going to do?"

Vitz laughed, but I called him to order. We held a council.

"Vitz, how much money do you make?" I asked.

"Oh, at least three hundred dollars a year."

"And you, Briggs?"

"Oh, if I get the old man accepted I'll make a hundred."

"Vitz, let us bury the Ancient One."

Vitz and I officiated in all capacities. When we returned to the cave Briggs and the girl were packing up all the stuff that was portable.

Vitz and I helped carry the loot, and just outside of Sucre we struck a mission house. A young priest married Briggs and Atla.

Vitz and I came home without Briggs.

To-day there is a picture in the Museum of Art with Briggs name attached. It is a princess in a cave, clad in cloth of gold.

It made him famous. The princess made him rich and happy, and the artist I thought was going to prove a fizzle, like Vitz, lives in a palace, and his wife is known as the most beautiful woman on all the continents. After paying the necessary tax to the government, they were still fabulously rich, and while I am willing to admit that Briggs did not deserve this good fortune, still, as a common man with ordinary common sense, I think it was a good thing for Briggs, and not a bad one for Atla.

Any way, what's the use of kicking? Elizabeth Munroe was married when I got back to New York, and I might have married Atla myself. But Briggs was always lucky.

SUMMER'S ENTRANCE.

O SOFT, sweet south wind! on thy balmy breeze
Comes the sweet message as it came of yore.
Summer stands, smiling, at the open door,
And leaves her kiss upon our hills and leas.
The birds are singing on the leafy trees;
The summer flowers start up from hill to shore;
And every creature feels new life once more—
All things obeying Nature's high decrees.

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THE CATSPAW.*

BY WILLIAM WALLACE COOK.

A Western story of boom days, and an exciting struggle between opposing factions to locate a mine.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

AMOS GLEASON, cow puncher, who tells the story, has been recommended by his employer to one Burnham in Helena, as "a trusty, cool-headed man who does not think too much of his neck when there is a chance to make big money." He finds that he is required simply to deliver a sealed letter to Jasper Cummings, in camp on Hermitage Mountain, on the border of the Papoose Creek Indian Reservation. Burnham is only one of five men who have employed Gleason on this errand, for the successful execution of which he is to receive ten thousand dollars, and as he leaves the office the cow puncher overhears one of them say, "I hate to see a man like that walk into the jaws of death. Pardridge's men are as thick as peas in the Kaslo hills."

But Gleason is all grit, and determines to push through with his commission, having already received an advance payment of five hundred dollars. But he has not proceeded far along the street, when he is assaulted by two ruffians, who try to wrest the letter from him. They do not succeed, and thereupon Gleason proceeds to make a dummy document, ready for the next attempt. Meantime he falls in with a young fellow on the train, who has already spoken to him on the streets of Helena. The latter gives his name as Francis Pardridge, and tells Gleason that his father was a prospector who discovered the claim that Cummings is to locate for Burnham. It is on the Indian reservation soon to be thrown open for settlement, and the elder Pardridge had intended to make the run with the other boomers and locate it, but dies from a fall. His last act was to try to write out instructions for finding the claim, but he had not the strength. "Ask Wilberforce" was as far as he got. But Wilberforce, a half-breed, sold his knowledge to Edgar Burnham and then was killed in a drunken brawl. Young Pardridge finishes his story by declaring that Cummings will possess the knowledge of the exact whereabouts of the claim as soon as Gleason delivers to him the letter he is carrying in his pocket. Then he offers the cow puncher a third interest in the mine if he helps himself and uncle instead of Burnham. But Gleason resists the bribe, and accepts a cigar which the young man seems very desirous he should take.

He encounters the young man again in the camp of an old fellow from who he purchases a horse named Dynamite. A while later, while riding peacefully along, he is lassoed by this same graybeard, who forces him to change clothes with him, and thus possesses himself not only of the dummy but the real letter to Jasper Cummings, to say nothing of the cigar, which he proceeds to smoke as he rides away in triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABLES TURNED.

IT is needless to say that I was gloomed up considerably.

There I was, midway between Herkimer and Verner's, minus Burnham's letter as well as its counterfeit, stripped to shirt, trousers, and stockings, and robbed of money and revolver.

Although chagrined, my temper was worked up to a point which would not allow me to acknowledge defeat. I was angry with myself because I had not suspected the graybeard of just such a trick.

I made sure, then, that he had introduced me to Dynamite the evening before in order that the cayuse might either kill or maim me. Disappointed in this respect, he had pushed out along the trail to Verner's and there made his preparations and lay in wait, well knowing that I would come.

Experience teaches a dear school, but evidently I was one of those who will learn in no other. It has never been my habit to sulk in misfortune, so I immediately set about doing my utmost to retrieve the disaster.

I had no use for the graybeard's cast-off clothing, and, after removing my stockings, I raced forward on the robber's trail in my bare feet. A mile farther I passed another boomer camp at the roadside.

There were three men in this party, and they were smoking comfortably in

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the shade of a tree and talking among themselves. As I came up opposite them my appearance aroused their curiosity.

We exchanged the conventional "howdy" of the frontier.

"You're travelin' light, neighbor, seems to me," said one of the men.

"Somewhat," I admitted. "Did you see a man go by here on a calico cayuse?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply; "Mose McGurck, on his horse Dynamite."

"That's his name, is it—Mose McGurck?"

"He calls himself that," laughed the man; "but names are easily come by in this country. The label a man carries doesn't always correspond with the one he got at his christenin'."

"What sort of a fellow is McGurck?"

"He's quick with his wits and they don't always steer him in the right course. I only know him by sight and by reputation, however, and one is about as bad as the other. He looked better than usual, though, as he went past just now. And he was smokin' a seegar and——"

I interrupted with a word of thanks and started on.

"Hold up!" the man shouted. "Are you going to try to reach Verner's on foot?"

"Why?" I halted to ask.

"I only wanted to say that Papoose Creek cuts the trail between here and Verner's and it's on the rampage. One wagon was carried away at the ford last night, and we're waitin' for the water to go down before we cross. You'd better do the same."

"I'm in too big a hurry to stop," said I. "How far is the creek from here?"

"A mile and a half, or such a matter."

I turned again and took up my swift pace. It was possible that the high water in Papoose Creek would cause McGurck to halt, and this hope fired me to an extra effort.

That "seegar" which the graybeard had insolently lighted when he rode away from me was the one the youth had insisted upon my taking in the compartment of the Pullman. I remembered the young fellow's agitation when the weed was presented, and some of the wonder I had felt returned to me then.

I could hear the racing tide of the creek long before I reached it, and, as a matter of precaution, I took to the woods at the trail side, in order to come upon my enemy unawares, providing he happened to be hung up on the bank of the swollen stream.

When I came out at the point where the road dipped into the water I was disappointed, for McGurck was not there.

The creek, as I could see by a streak of mud at the water's edge, was going down, but it was still too high and swift for the safe passage of wagons. In the ooze where the trail took the ford I could see the fresh hoofprints of a horse.

Dynamite left those hoofprints, I made no doubt. McGurck, I reasoned, had chanced it and gone across.

Being a strong swimmer, I was making preparations to follow, when a glance back along the trail showed me something that startled me. At the point where the trail pitched downward toward the creek, I made out the form of a man stretched silently along the ground.

On hastening up to him my astonishment increased, for the man was none other than the one I was trying to find.

Had the old rascal met with foul play, I asked myself? Then I went down on my knees beside him to find out.

He had no wound that I could discover. Being well along in years, I reasoned he may have been subject to attacks of vertigo, or some form of catalepsy, or——

Abruptly I had another thought. The thought was suggested by that black cigar which lay near him, half smoked.

Had the weed been drugged for my benefit? Was it the intention of the youth who called himself Francis Gleason to have me smoke myself into a state of unconsciousness, there in the Pullman, so he might get by stealth what he could not secure otherwise?

I had heard of such cigars, but had

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never before encountered one of them. To test my theory, I picked up the remains of the weed and unrolled it.

Nothing suspicious met my eyes, but there was a faint odor, apart from the rankness of burned tobacco, that gave color to my supposition. Then the young fellow's nervousness when he gave me the cigar and tried to get me to smoke it returned to my mind.

I laughed aloud. Here was a case of poetic justice, if there ever was one.

McGurck lay like one in a deep sleep, breathing heavily. The cigar had taken effect, I supposed, and he had pitched from the saddle, leaving Dynamite to proceed without a rider.

That the horse, of his own accord, had gone on across the swollen stream might be explained by assuming that Verner's ranch was familiar to him. Instinct will always carry a horse to the place he knows best.

Settling these matters, however, was beside the question. At my feet my enemy lay helpless, with all my property intact, and I proceeded, without the loss of a moment, to repossess myself of my belongings.

Burnham's letter was still in the lining of my coat, the counterfeit letter was in the breast pocket, and my "bulldog" revolver in another. Fortune had never been kinder to me, and I drew a deep breath of satisfaction as I put on my stockings and my boots.

When again completely clad in my own wardrobe, I drew the graybeard's fangs by picking up his long-barreled rifle, which had fallen near him, and throwing it as far as I could into the waters of Papoose Creek.

Barely had I accomplished this when a sound of hoofs and wheels struck on my ears, advancing upon the ford along the trail behind me. A vehicle of some sort was coming, and to be found there with a stripped and unconscious man in the road would have given rise to questions which might have proved disagreeable.

In order to avoid a cross-examination from those who were approaching, I laid hold of McGurck and dragged him out of sight into the brush. Then I sat down on the bank of the creek and waited.

If the newcomers proved to be those who had told me McGurck's name, and something of his character, they would certainly note my changed appearance and possibly interrogate me as to the manner in which I had been able to complete my costume. Should they further recognize my added clothing as that worn by McGurck, it would probably be necessary for me to tell them everything.

I had made up my mind to do this when the vehicle I had heard hove into sight at the top of the rise and came slowly down toward the ford. It was not the wagon belonging to the three boomers, but an old-fashioned Concord coach, drawn by four horses and packed with passengers.

CHAPTER VII.

CAUGHT IN THE FLOOD.

I THOUGHT that I had had troubles enough for one day, and now that I had recovered all my belongings with the exception of my horse and riding equipments, the sight of the stage aroused a hope that I might secure a ride the rest of the way to Verner's.

But the day was still young and destined to prove ripe with disappointments.

I watched curiously while the old coach lumbered down from the crest of the low hill to the water's edge.

Two passengers were riding on the box with the driver, and through the window in the top of the door nearest me I could see six other passengers, one of them a woman closely veiled. The boot was piled high with trunks and boxes.

The three men on the box were dividing their attention about equally between myself and Papoose Creek.

"Any one crossed here lately?" the driver asked of me in an anxious voice.

"Not that I know of," I answered.

"I see the tracks of a horse in the mud there," said the man on the driver's right, pointing.

"My saddle horse left those," I returned. "He got away from me and went on. I have been waiting for a lift over. Can you take me up, driver?"

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"I'm overloaded now," demurred the driver. "There are too many by half in this old stage, considerin' the height of the water."

"Is the crossing dangerous, driver?" piped an agitated voice, as a thin face was pushed through the window in the door.

"This ford is never any too safe," replied the driver. "A narrow bar crosses the creek here, and to get a few feet to right or left, even in ordinary times, means to plunge off the bar into ten feet of water. Now, with old Papoose on the war path, I guess we'll be runnin' quite a risk."

"Then I refuse to go a step farther," cried the nervous passenger, throwing open the door and leaping out.

He was a small, meager man, and when his eyes rested on the swirling waters of the creek he clasped his thin hands impressively together.

"My, my!" he gasped. "Why, it's rank suicide to try to cross. I shouldn't have left Herkimer if I had known this. I thought you said the ford was safe, driver?"

"I heard it was," answered the driver. "I laid over yesterday in Herkimer just on account of the creek, and word came down last night that it was fordable. I didn't expect to find it as high as this."

"Turn right around and go back to town," proceeded the frightened passenger. "That's the only thing you can do!"

"Oh, gammon!" came disgustedly from the man on the driver's left. "The ford's all right. I've paid my money to get to Verner's and don't intend to get hung up on account of a ditch full of water."

"That's me, too," spoke up the man on the other side of the driver. He nodded to me as he added: "If that man's horse could cross, I guess we can cross, too."

"There's a difference between a horse with an empty saddle and a loaded stage like this," said the driver sharply. "Still, if the majority of you want to try it, I'm willin'. It's all in the day's work, anyhow."

While this talk was going forward, I saw the veiled face of the woman appear in the open door of the vehicle, turned in my direction. For one long moment she looked at me, and then, as I swerved my eyes full upon her, she dropped hastily back in her seat.

The driver appealed to his passengers to learn whether he should attempt to cross. Five were in favor of proceeding and only three thought it better to turn back.

The woman, answering the driver's question as to whether she wanted to risk crossing, merely nodded her head. At length it was decided that the baggage should be taken from the boot and that the coach should attempt to get over with only part of its complement of passengers.

The two men were to remain on the seat with the driver, and I was allowed to get inside with the woman, who courageously kept her place. The remaining five passengers were left on the bank to watch us.

If the ford proved perfectly safe the driver was to return for them and the baggage.

The harness was looked to and found to be all right. After that we started.

For the first fifteen feet the horses labored through sticky mud and the coach bogged badly. But from then on the bed of the creek grew firmer, for we had reached the bar.

As the ground under us became harder, however, the water steadily rose. At last it was over the hubs of the rear wheels, the brakes were submerged, and occasionally the churned-up eddies washed in under the door, making it necessary for the woman and myself to lift our feet in order to save them a wetting.

All this time the woman had been silent. Sitting on the up-stream side, she kept her veiled face close to the window.

She seemed perfectly cool and self-possessed, and I could not help giving her a curious glance from time to time. The lines of her form were slender and graceful, and under her hat brim, below the knot of her veil, I caught a flash of short, yellowish hair.

She was young, evidently. And for one so young to be so courageous aroused my admiration.

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My attention was drawn abruptly from my fellow passenger by a new source of peril that threatened us.

The swift water, now flank deep, had frightened the horses, and all three men on the box had to shout at them and the driver was compelled to use the lash of his long whip with cruel force on the leaders.

The bar ran straight across from bank to bank. As danger lay on either side of it, it was necessary to cross "broadside on" to the current, which thus had full play against us.

Instinct taught the horses to breast the swift flow, and the men on the box had their hands full to keep them from turning. Already we were half way over, and if the leaders could be held steady and kept going, we should make the crossing in safety.

But this was not to be. Suddenly the horses became unmanageable and the leaders balked and reared.

I heard cries of alarm from the bank behind us, and redoubled shouts and no little profanity from the men on the box. The coach was at a dead halt, the water inside half way between the floor and the seats.

A halt right there was dangerous. The current hurled all its strength against the bulky old vehicle, and I felt it slowly lift on the up-stream side.

Wilder grew the shouts of the men outside and more furious the use of the driver's long whip. But the horses would not start. The frenzy of the leaders had communicated itself to the wheel-horses, and the whole four of them were plunging and rearing and out of all control.

I flung myself to the up-stream side of the rocking coach, hoping my weight, added to the woman's, would serve to ballast it down. But it did not make any appreciable difference, and I knew then that disaster was certain to overtake us.

Presently a wheel horse threw himself and went under completely. He bobbed up again, snorting and blowing, but tangled in the harness.

I had thrown open the door and, standing on the brake beam, almost thigh-deep in water, was looking out and measuring the chances.

The driver, with a startled oath, made haste to lower himself down on the tongue, which was at least two feet under the surface.

"Take care of yourselves, inside, there!" he yelled. "We're in for a ducking, or I don't know the signs."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when over we went. My feet slipped along the brake beam to the "reach," and for a fraction of a minute I stood thus, in water up to my hips and clinging with one hand to the circumference of the rear wheel, which was lying flat with the surface of the creek.

A cry of alarm came from the girl—the first sound that had escaped her lips in my hearing—and I leaned over with my free arm and caught her firmly about the waist.

"Steady!" I called to her, as encouragingly as I could. "I'll lift you out, miss, and try to wade ashore with you. It's the only thing to be done. Keep your courage!"

In that critical moment she did very well indeed, helping herself as well as she could and so helping me. Yet the fates were against us, for the coach, now lying on its side and freed of the weight of the three on the box, who had taken to the stream, was forced off the bar into deep water.

Barely had I raised the woman through the door when the vehicle slipped down the incline of the bar and the swift water closed around and over us. Then I think I had one of the most desperate battles that has ever fallen to my lot.

I was handicapped sorely by my clothing and by the woman, who, in a first wild spasm of fear, flung her arms about me, making any attempt to swim impossible.

I had to use rough measures to free myself of the encircling arms, but finally I succeeded and we came up, spluttering and choking, to the surface. To regain the bar was out of the question, and I laid my course toward the nearest shore, supporting my companion so that her head was out of water.

She had given up her struggles; not because she had fainted or been

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strangled into unconsciousness, but because her courage had returned when she realized that she must not hamper my efforts in any way if either of us was to be saved. The current that had been our enemy was now our friend, its very swiftness helping to keep us afloat.

Slowly but surely we gained the bank, and finally my feet touched bottom, full a hundred yards below the ford. My companion was too weak to help herself, and I gathered her up in my arms, although myself a good deal spent, and staggered with her to dry land.

After putting her down, I dropped on the bank and lay there, wet as a drowned rat and completely fagged. A few minutes passed and then a cool, wet hand on my forehead caused me to open my eyes with a start.

"You made a brave fight of it, and won," said a soft voice, a voice that seemed familiar in my ears. "It was foolish of me to insist on staying in the coach and trying to cross, but I was in a hurry to reach Grafton's ranch. You saved my life, and I want you to know that I am grateful. Are you hurt at all?"

I raised up and stared into the woman's face. The hat, with its thick veil, had been lost in the flood and the face I saw amazed and startled me.

"Why," I muttered, staring at her harder than ever, "can it be that you are——" I paused and brushed my damp hand across my forehead.

"Frances Pardridge," she added, with a little tightening of the lips, as a faint tinge of color flew to her round cheeks. "We have met before, Mr. Gleason."

CHAPTER VIII.

GRAFTON'S.

My brain, as yet none too steady, was in a whirl at this astounding discovery.

This young woman was the very picture of the supposed youth whom I had encountered in Helena, had talked with in the smoking compartment of the Pullman, and had seen for a third time in the camp of Mose McGurck.

For a brief space I failed to catch the drift of her last remark. I overlooked the chance play there might have been on the Christian name whereby "Frances" became "Francis," and wondered if she was a sister of the youth. She read the question in my eyes.

"I am really the person you talked with on the train, Mr. Gleason. At that time, for reasons of my own, I seemed to—to be otherwise than I really was. I do not ask you to forgive the deception. The part was hard for me, but I thought it necessary."

In the wave of understanding that swept over me, the one thought uppermost in my mind was this: I had risked my life to save the woman who had deceived me, had tried to bribe me, and then had attempted to trick me into my own undoing.

My face hardened. It was by no will of hers that that cheap trick had proved a boomerang and recoiled with full force upon the person of the miserable McGurck.

The information vouchsafed me by the proprietor of the restaurant in Herkimer recurred to me. The unfortunate Dave Pardridge had had no son, but it was fair to assume that this was his daughter.

I got up slowly, without a word, and looked up stream toward the ford.

We were on the opposite bank, and I was relieved to see that the driver of the coach and the other two men had also reached safety, having cut loose the horses and made the animals help in snaking them out to dry land.

The five passengers who had been left behind were sitting in a huddled group on the luggage and were looking almost as forlorn as we did. Where the stage coach was there was no telling; probably it could not be located and recovered until the water receded.

"I can see that you are angry," came the low voice of the girl behind me. "I am sorry for it, Mr. Gleason, but I do not blame you."

I turned on her and saw her upper lip quiver as she added:

"Perhaps when you know more you will not judge me so harshly. I shall try to make some return to you for the danger you incurred on my account."

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The deep feeling back of her words and manner softened me somewhat.

"I do not ask for any return, Miss Pardridge," said I. "Even if I had known who you were I should have worked just as hard to get you out of the water. I am not a boomer, as you know. An errand brings me to this country, and all I ask is to be left free to do it.

"Your friend"—I laid some stress on the words—"your friend, Mr. McGurck, failed in what he attempted to do this morning. Otherwise, perhaps, I should not have been in the coach to help you."

There was no call for me, at that moment, to assume a haughty manner and talk of McGurck. Hatless, my boots muddy to their tops, and my clothes dripping, I must have made a ludicrous attempt at dignity.

Nor was Miss Pardridge in any better plight than myself. Besides, she was a woman and had not the same strength to withstand a trying experience such as we had just undergone.

I saw the pallor deepen in her face and she swayed as though about to fall. I sprang to her to give her support, but she recovered herself quickly and waved me off.

"It is nothing," she said, trying to be brave in spite of her weakness. "I am going to Grafton's Ranch, and it is only a mile farther on. I can walk the rest of the way easily."

She started unsteadily toward the trail as she finished speaking.

"Let me help you!" I cried, starting after her. "You are not able to go on alone."

"Yes," she returned, "I am able, and you must not help me to reach Grafton's. When you pass the ranch, don't stop there! Do you understand, Mr. Gleason? Don't stop there."

Her strange insistence puzzled me, and I stood watching her as she pluckily started on again. She had not gone far before I saw her sink to the ground and cover her face with her hands.

I hurried to her side and found that she was crying. Then I cursed myself for my churlishness.

"Is this Grafton a friend of yours?" I asked gently.

"Yes," she answered, between sobs.

"Then you must get there at once, and I insist on taking you."

I did not listen to her remonstrances. A thought struck me that I could get one of the stage horses for her, and I whirled and ran to the spot where they were being held by one of the men who had been on the box with the driver.

The driver turned out to be a very philosophical sort of a fellow. Standing on the bank, he was shouting suggestions to the five men on the other side and parrying their rather heated thrusts as to his culpability with the greatest good nature.

His conscience was not troubling him. He was an employee and not the owner of the stage line and a majority of his passengers had urged him to get across, if he could. He had saved the horses and the old coach would also be saved, in time.

"There are just two things you can do, friends," the driver shouted; "either camp there until the creek goes down and some boomer comes along who'll haul you over here, or else go back to the last boomer camp and arrange to be carted to Herkimer, bag and baggage."

While he was talking, I saw a slouching, unkempt figure push out of the bushes beside the trail and come slowly down to the ford, wabbling back and forth across the road as it walked. It was Mose McGurck.

The old rascal had finally recovered sufficiently to be able to get up and move around, but his eccentric actions and blank expression of his face proved that he was yet far from being himself.

The nervous man on the other bank let off a cry of alarm at sight of McGurck, and started for the side of the trail to get out of danger's way if it should be necessary. But McGurck proved harmless enough.

His brain was still clouded and he was endeavoring feebly to discover where he was and what had happened to him. He stumbled over a trunk, then got up mechanically and sat down on it.

"Gee-mi-nee!" exclaimed the driver. "I'm a sinner if there ain't old Mose

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McGurck, and he looks like he'd been through a cyclone. Don't be scart of him," he yelled. "He's gone daft, seems like; but he won't hurt you."

Mose, apparently, had not recovered his powers of speech, and I thought it just as well to get out of the way before he did.

I told the driver what I wanted, and why, and he allowed me to take the gentlest of the four horses. All the harness, except the bridle, was stripped off, and I started along the trail, leading the horse by the bridle reins.

I could not see Miss Pardridge and concluded that she was trying to reach Grafton's without my aid. As I hurried along, I felt through my soaked pockets to learn how many of my valuables had been left in Papoose Creek.

Both letters were safe, but they were limp enough. The address on the counterfeit letter was blurred, although still legible, and the same was true of the Burnham document.

A roll of waterlogged bank notes was in my vest pocket, for which I was duly thankful, but my silver watch was gone; also my pipe and tobacco and the "bulldog" revolver.

In a few moments I came upon Miss Pardridge seated on a boulder beside the road. She looked very disconsolate, and my persistence must have disarmed her objections to my company, for she allowed me to assist her to the horse's back and then to lead the animal on up the trail.

I said nothing, and neither did she, until we came to a halt in front of a comfortable-looking cabin. From the stove-pipe chimney of a "lean-to" at one side of the cabin a cheerful smoke curled upward, and I was indulging a hope of comfort at the kitchen stove when my companion leaned downward to say, in a low tone:

"This is Grafton's ranch, Mr. Gleason. You must go back now, or else take this horse and ride on to Verner's."

"I could take a lot of comfort at a fire," I returned.

"Not at Grafton's fire, I'm afraid."

She looked toward the cabin at that moment, as though fearing some one might come out and see us.

"I'll risk it," I said, curious to learn why she was holding me away from the place.

"The risk will be greater than you imagine," she answered, in a voice of intense earnestness.

Just then, before she had a chance to urge me further, a man came around the corner of the house. The man was very tall and spare and wore a green patch over his left eye.

He stopped short at sight of us there in the trail, plainly surprised and taken aback.

"Go, now, Mr. Gleason," breathed the girl, slipping from the horse's back to the ground, "go, I beg of you!"

"Why, hullo, girl!" cried the one-eyed man, starting toward us. "What's the matter? Where's the stage? What's happened to you?"

"The stage was overturned in Papoose Creek, Uncle Sim," replied Miss Pardridge, starting into the house. "I was nearly swept away and drowned. Come into the cabin and I'll tell you about it."

I understood the situation now. The girl was coming to Grafton's to meet her uncle, and she, against her own interest, no doubt, was doing her best to keep her uncle and me apart.

If only Sim Pardridge was there, I should not have hesitated to stand my ground. But more of his friends might be in the vicinity, and I had to consider the safety of Burnham's letter.

I sprang to the back of the horse, intending to leave Grafton's as fast and as far in the rear as I could. But I reckoned without my host.

Sim Pardridge did not go to his niece but leaped for me. No sooner was I on the horse's back than I found him hanging to the bit rings.

"Not so fast, friend," said Sim Pardridge, his one eye gleaming as it traveled over me; "I'd like a few words with you before you tear yourself away."

"Besides," and here his thin lips curled into a grim smile, "you look as though you had been in Papoose Creek, too. Grafton is a good friend of mine, and I can't think of letting you go on until you come into the cabin and dry off. Dismount!"

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His right hand dropped from the bit ring and flew to his hip, under his coat. When it reappeared it held an uncomfortable-looking six-shooter.

I was not foolish enough to spur the horse in a wild attempt to break away. There are some kinds of folly that even a reckless cowboy will recognize.

Pardridge waved the muzzle of his weapon toward the door of the cabin and I got down, prepared to accept the invitation and go inside.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HOSPITABLE MR. PARDRIDGE.

THE next moment I was very glad that I accepted Mr. Pardridge's invitation, for two men appeared, one around the end of the cabin. One of these men had a shotgun.

The girl, very white, was leaning in the doorway.

"Why do you stop him, Uncle Sim?" she asked. "He is in a hurry to get to Verner's."

Uncle Sim got me in a line between himself and the door and flung his answer over my shoulder.

"I'll explain my reasons, Frank," said he, "after you tell me how you managed to get out of Papoose Creek."

"It's easily told," she returned; "that gentleman saved me. If my life is of any importance he has earned your gratitude as well as my own."

"I'm obliged to him!" exclaimed Mr. Pardridge. "I'll show him how grateful I am after I get him in the house. After what he has done I couldn't think of letting him go on in the condition he is."

He siddled around to my elbow, still holding the horse with his left hand and the revolver with his right.

"Mr. Gleason, I take it?"

"That's my name," said I, for I saw the uselessness of saying anything else.

"My niece didn't introduce us," went on Sim Pardridge dryly, "but I'm her uncle and quite a good deal at your service."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting one of your friends, Mr. Pardridge," said I. "Mr. McGurck is the gentleman I refer to. I hope my relations with you will be as pleasant as they were with him."

A trace of concern crossed the thin face of Pardridge, but it was only a trace.

"As Mr. McGurck has not reported yet," said he, "I have no means of knowing what your relations were with him. By the way, here are two more gentlemen whom you have met before. Mr. Gleason, Mr. Purcell and Mr. Grafton."

Mr. Pardridge was claiming so much of my attention that I had not given much notice to the two men who had come last upon the scene. As Pardridge spoke their names, he indicated each one separately with a flourish of the revolver.

Grafton and Purcell, I now discovered, were the two worthies who had made the attack on me in Helena, and whom I had recently seen leaving the train at Herkimer with Miss Pardridge.

Certainly the girl had a good general to lead her forces in the fight with Burnham. Sim Pardridge had so disposed his men and arranged matters that he was kept well informed concerning myself and my actions.

Purcell and Grafton, I made no doubt, had brought news of me to Pardridge, and that they had forded Papoose Creek proved it passable—for horsemen, at least.

Uncle Sim, with his good English and determined air, made a strong impression on me. To combat him with brute force was out of the question. If I won the day at all it would be by tact and finesse.

Grafton and Purcell grinned at me. But whether their enjoyment was caused by my discomfiture, or by my bedraggled appearance, I do not know.

"Grafton," proceeded Sim Pardridge, "I have extended the hospitalities of your ranch to Mr. Gleason. I understand that he has saved my niece from the raging waters of Papoose Creek. That being the case, I can do no less than take him in and entertain him."

"Sure you can't," acquiesced Grafton cheerfully.

"Have you any weapons about you, Mr. Gleason?" asked Pardridge. "I

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will not search you; your word will be sufficient."

"The only weapon I had," I answered, "was lost in the creek."

Again a trace of worry showed itself in Pardridge's face.

"Did you lose anything else in the creek?" he inquired.

"My watch and my pipe and tobacco."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

Pardridge seemed relieved.

"I shall be pleased to give you something to smoke," said he. "Cigars are none too good for friends of mine. We have plenty of them."

"I don't care for any of your cigars," I answered. "Your niece gave me one, but McGurck smoked it. From the effect it had on him, I should judge that your cigars are a little bit stronger than I have been in the habit of using."

Miss Pardridge had already vanished from the doorway into the house, so she did not hear what I said about McGurck. The three men exchanged quick glances, and I could see that I had them guessing.

"Mr. Gleason must be very uncomfortable in his wet clothes," went on Pardridge. "Grafton, take his horse to the barn——"

"That's not my horse," said I. "It's one of those that hauled the stage coach. I borrowed it for your niece."

"Very thoughtful of you. Take it to the barn any way, Grafton, and hold it until called for."

The owner of the ranch relieved Pardridge of the horse, and I went into the cabin, followed by Pardridge and Purcell, the former still carrying his six-shooter and the latter his shotgun.

There was no one, aside from ourselves, in the front room of the cabin, but I could hear women's voices from behind a closed door that opened off on the right.

Pardridge stepped to the door and knocked. It was opened narrowly and I caught sight of a buxom, red-faced woman.

"Are you taking care of Frank, Mrs. Grafton?" inquired Pardridge.

"Yes," was the answer. "The poor dear has had a turrible experience an' she's that worn out she can't hardly lift her head."

"Well, do all you can for her, and in the meantime give us the use of the kitchen for an hour. Mr. Gleason, here, will have to dry his wet clothing by the kitchen fire."

The woman swerved her eyes toward me and a faint smile crossed her fat face.

"All right," said she, and closed the door.

Then we passed on to the kitchen, Purcell first to show the way, then myself, and then Pardridge. It was a nice arrangement and subtly planned to prevent my escape.

Mrs. Grafton had a good fire going, ready to cook the noon meal. Pardridge had me take a chair at one side of the kitchen table, seating himself on the other side.

A window near the table was open. Pardridge caught me looking at it and shook his head significantly.

"It won't do," he said. "It is so pleasant to have you with us that we can't think of letting you go yet a while. You might lay what you have about you on the table, then take off your clothes and hang them about the stove."

I brought out the roll of wet money and separated the bills, disposing them about the table top. After that, I carried a chair closer to the stove, sat down again and began to steam.

Uncle Sim's one eye never left me. It was a penetrating eye and bored into me like a gimlet.

"Better empty your pockets," he said.

"I think not," I returned as coolly as I could.

"Don't compel me to use harsh measures now, after putting me in your debt as you have."

I made no response. At that moment Grafton came in and Sim Pardridge got up.

No words passed between the two, but Grafton dropped into Pardridge's chair and took his revolver. Then Pardridge went out.

Following that, we had a sort of Quaker meeting—Grafton, Purcell, and I. The spirit did not move us to speech.

Now and again I cast longing looks at

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the open window, but the shotgun and revolver had a restraining effect. The last time my eyes rested on the opening, I saw a form push into it and stand on the outside, leaning over the sill.

Although the newcomer was McGurck, I took his appearance as a matter of course and smiled at him good naturedly. He wore an injured look, water drops glimmered in his bushy gray beard, and the few clothes he had on were as wet as my own had been.

"Got him, hev ye?" inquired McGurck, wagging his head toward me.

"Sure," answered Grafton. "What ails ye, Mac?"

"Swum the crick on one of the stage hosses. Whar's Sim?"

"In the front o' the cabin, talkin' with Frank."

McGurck drew away from the window, and we could hear him slopping around the side of the house on his way to the front door.

After that silence fell over us once more. Half an hour later I was dry enough for comfort, and got up, went to the table and collected the damp money I had left there. As I thrust it back into my vest, Pardridge came in.

His sallow face flushed and he appeared to be in bad humor.

"Get out, Grafton, you and Purcell," said he. "I want to be alone with Gleason and have a talk with him."

Grafton returned the revolver to Pardridge and left the kitchen, followed by Purcell. Heeding a movement of Pardridge's hand, I sank down in the chair vacated by Purcell.

"It's astonishing how things fall out sometimes," said Pardridge. He was quiet for a space, then added: "McGurck has just come in and I know all about the pleasant relations you had with him."

"A loaded cigar is a tricky weapon to fight with," I returned casually. "I should think that a man like you, Pardridge, might be in a better business than forcing your niece to disguise herself and work with such weapons."

His one eye glowed as he leaned across the table toward me and answered, punctuating his words by rapping on the boards with the muzzle of the six-shooter.

"When you fight the devil you've got to use fire! Burnham is a treacherous hound, and any way to beat him is good enough for me."

Pardridge sank back in his chair.

"I've talked with my niece, Gleason," he resumed, in a less passionate tone, "and although she's young and impressionable, yet from what she tells me I believe you're an honest man and a brave one. When you hired out as a messenger to Burnham I'll warrant you hadn't the remotest idea of the dangers you were to encounter in the Kaslo Hills."

"On the contrary," I answered, "I had a very good idea."

"Did Burnham give you his version of this mine affair?"

I knew that Pardridge's information, however he had acquired it, was accurate and that there was no earthly use in dodging his questions.

"He didn't tell me a word about any mine."

"You were to get ten thousand dollars for carrying a letter to Jasper Cummings, on Hermitage Mountain. Didn't you scent knavery in the very proposition?"

"I was dealing with other men besides Burnham," said I—"men whose honesty is beyond question."

"Burnham is a smooth talker and he has deceived those other men."

"I didn't know it then, and I don't think, Mr. Pardridge, that I should take your word for it now."

He frowned and pursed up his lips. After an interval of silence he continued:

"What Frank told you, in the smoking compartment of the Pullman, is gospel truth. Burnham is a sharper; he got around Wilberforce, found out the location of my brother's mine, and is trying to steal it. If you deliver that letter, and collect your ten thousand dollars, you will be a party to the theft."

"I shall deliver the letter," said I.

Pardridge jumped up and brought his lean fist down on the table with a bang.

"By Heaven, you won't!" he cried.

"Then"—and I didn't say it for effect, either—"you'll take the letter off a dead man, Pardridge."

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"Don't be a fool," he said, dropping back into his chair.

"Better a fool than a traitor," I answered.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed irritably. "Can't you see I don't want to hurt you, or even lay hands on you, after what you have done for Frank? The girl feels now as though she wanted to beggar herself on account of your false notions of duty to Burnham. Yes, sir, in that front room she has been begging me to let you go on to Hermitage Mountain with that letter. She'd let herself be cheated out of her rights—she'd put up with this rank injustice, I say—just because you see fit to take the bit in your teeth and help Burnham trick her out of what's her own.

"Be a man, Gleason!" Pardridge's voice sank to a persuasive pitch. "Show this scoundrel, Burnham, that you will not help him out in his tricky plot. Give up the letter to me and take a third interest in the mine, and——"

"No!" I interrupted.

The most dangerous ground for me was this injustice to the girl; when Pardridge began to bribe, he struck a false note and aroused my antagonism afresh.

"Living or dead, Gleason," snapped Pardridge, "I'll have that letter out of you. If you won't take an interest in the mine, if you won't consider the injustice of it all, if you won't yield a point for the girl, then you leave me no alternative but to use force."

I had nothing to say to this. Pardridge quickly got himself in hand again and proceeded.

"I can't understand Frank. She wants me to explain to you that, dressed in men's clothes, she could go to Helena and do things which would be impossible for a woman. Also, that that loaded cigar was a makeshift suggested by Purcell, who told her no evil effects would follow its use—the girl would never have tried the trick if she had not been persuaded to by Purcell and Grafton, who were aboard the train with her.

"This explanation doesn't cut much figure, one way or the other, but Frank insisted that I should make it to you, and so I've done it. I'm sorry McGurck went so far as to take your clothes and personal effects; that was robbery, and McGurck has only himself to blame that he overreached himself.

"Dynamite, the horse you bought of Mose, is here in Grafton's barn. The horse originally belonged to Grafton and it was only natural that he should swim the creek and come here when Mose tumbled out of the saddle. McGurck had hoped you would be thrown and hurt in trying to ride the horse and was mightily surprised when you tamed the brute and rode off with him. Mose had to carry his *riata* a good piece out on the trail to Verner's and walk all the way, just on account of his foolishness in selling Dynamite.

"The horse belongs to you, and after we eat dinner your trapping will be put on him again and he will be brought around in front. You can then give up the letter, mount, and ride where you please. That's my last word to you, Gleason."

I could have yielded at once and given up the dummy letter, but feared to arouse suspicion by so doing. With Dynamite at hand, and ready, I could allow the letter to be taken from me and then, perhaps, get well along the trail before Pardridge discovered the envelope contained only blank paper.

After this talk, Pardridge and I passed to the front of the cabin, where we sat on a bench in the shade with Purcell and Grafton. Mrs. Grafton, now that the kitchen was free to her, went out and began preparing dinner.

Miss Pardridge did not show herself, either before dinner or during the meal. While all three of the men took precautions to keep me safe, apart from that, a person uninformed of the true situation would have thought them entertaining a guest in hospitable Western fashion.

The talk turned on everything but Burnham and the mine. When the meal was over we returned to the front of the cabin again.

As Pardridge had arranged, my horse, equipped with all my paraphernalia, down to rope and picket pin, stood ready at a hitching post. On the saddlehorn hung a wide-brimmed hat, almost new.

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Pardridge explained that the hat was an extra one belonging to him and hoped I would take it. It was no more than right, he said, and, anyhow, Frank wished it.

Grafton pulled the looped bridle reins off the post as I took the hat from the pommel, tried it, then let out the buckle of the leather band a notch to make the headgear nearer my size. While putting the hat on finally, I turned to Pardridge, and over his shoulder caught a glimpse of a white, apprehensive face at one of the cabin windows.

The face vanished as I looked, but not until I had become assured that Frances Pardridge was alive to the crisis in my affairs and was fearful of the result. I smiled a little, I think. It was as good as a play, this to-do over that bogus document in the breast of my coat.

A deep and impressive pause followed my work with the hat. Mrs. Grafton, breathing heavily from excitement, came slowly around the corner of the cabin and stood watching.

Grafton held the horse, Pardridge confronted me squarely with his revolver in his hand, and Purcell still clung to his shotgun.

"Well?" said Pardridge impatiently.

"Burnham may be a rascal," said I, "but, so far, I have only your word for it, Pardridge. I shall not prove a traitor to him and his friends."

"Then throw up your hands! I mean it, by Heaven! I'm getting tired of this foolishness."

Pardridge's one eye gleamed along his revolver barrel. .

"This is as much highway robbery," I shouted, "as though you took my money! You are no better than McGurck."

Pardridge did not argue the point.

"You know where he kept that letter while in Helena, Purcell," went on Pardridge in cool, crisp tones. "Take it!"

Purcell stepped to my side, so as to leave the range clear for Pardridge, and reached for my inside pocket. In a twinkling I grappled with him and got him between me and the revolver.

A scream came from the cabin and I caught the flash of a white dress.

"Uncle Sim," cried the shrill voice of the girl as she ran toward her uncle, "I command you, I order you, to let him go! This is my battle you are fighting, and I will not have you hurt him!"

"Stand back!" roared Pardridge. "Mrs. Grafton——"

But the older woman was already at the girl's side, restraining her. During this byplay I was having my hands full with Purcell.

I tried to get his shotgun, but failed. Suddenly he jerked loose and leaped from me with a shout of triumph.

"Hyer it is, Sim!" he cried, waving the letter.

"I'll be back here with a file of Indian police!" I declared angrily as I flung myself into the saddle.

"You'll have your trouble for your pains," Pardridge answered ironically, taking the letter from Purcell. "Hold that horse a minute, Grafton."

Grafton had already passed me the bridle reins, but at this order from his chief he grabbed the bit rings. Pardridge was cunning enough to make sure that the letter was the right one before I was well away.

(To be continued.)

JULY.

Now is the time to be laughing and merry!
The days seem as short as hours;
Sweet month of the berry, red month of the cherry,
When even the fruits seem flowers!

Through lattice of leaves the sunbeams vagrant
Illumine the earthy glooms;
And gleams through the ether of gardens fragrant
The splendor of crimson blooms.

George Birdseye.

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A FORTUNATE SLIP.

BY F. K. SCRIBNER.

The part played by chance in bringing success out of anticipated failure.

I WAS arranging the contents of my desk in the general office at the department, preparatory to closing up for the day, when a messenger came hurrying down the long room and pulled up at my side.

"The chief would like to see you for a moment, Mr. Hanson," said he, in that jerky tone so common to government messengers who stand next to the heads of departments, and was off again before I could growl out a reply.

I had an engagement at the Arlington for dinner that evening, and if the chief detained me very long I should be late in dressing.

I pulled down the top of my desk with a bang and followed in the wake of the messenger: the door of the chief's private office was partially open, and I entered without ceremony.

As I crossed the threshold, the colonel's private secretary motioned me to the little inner room, where the chief usually held his confidential interviews with visitors of importance and gave us our instructions.

"What is it?" I asked. "I'm due at the Arlington in an hour, and supposed the old man had gone home."

The secretary was usually pretty well acquainted with what the chief had on hand.

He shook his head.

"Go in and find out; there haven't been any cables or messages of importance this afternoon; perhaps the colonel's going to give you a holiday."

I knocked on the glass panel of the door to the inner office, and the chief's well-known voice called: "Come in!"

He was sitting at his desk, smoking a cigar, and nodded pleasantly as I entered and closed the door behind me.

"Take a chair, Mr. Hanson," said he shortly, and turned to a little drawer marked double X.

I saw the prospective dinner slipping away from me; taking a chair in the inner office meant the colonel was going to spring something which was considered of importance by the department, and the drawer marked with the double X usually contained cables or telegrams which were to be acted upon without delay.

We agents of the United States Secret Service Department were expected to stand ready to take up the reins at a moment's notice. Whether it was only a few minutes' run over to the Pennsylvania station, to keep an eye on a certain passenger who was expected to alight from an incoming train, or a hurried trip to Chicago or San Francisco, we were to be prepared to jump into active service at a word from our superior.

I had had the good fortune to distinguish myself in several important cases, and the chief had shown his appreciation by letting me off from assignments of trivial moment. To receive a summons at that hour of the day portended something above the ordinary.

The colonel took a folded paper from the drawer and adjusted his eye-glasses.

"Mr. Hanson," said he, wheeling around in his chair so that he faced me, "I wish you to take the first express for New York. Read that, sir!"

I took the paper which he extended to me, and, opening it, ran my eye over the contents; it was a cablegram, dated Berlin, and was from one of our agents on the Continent.

It was brief and to the point.

M. Lowenberg just arrived from Vienna, en route for New York via London. Purchased great ruby. Crown jewels Servia. Have wired D., who will cable ship.

The original despatch had been in cipher and the copy I held was in the

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colonel's handwriting. D. was our agent in London, and the second cable which the chief handed me was signed by him.

M. Lowenberg sailed ss. Pomerania, Cunard. First cabin.

I passed the two slips of paper back to the colonel. He carefully tore them into bits and dropped the pieces in the cuspidor.

"You know Lowenberg?" asked he briefly.

I did, though it had never been my fortune to meet the gentleman.

"The smartest diamond smuggler in America," said I dryly.

The chief nodded.

"Has carried in more jewels than any other dozen men, or women, who have passed the customs. He's practically been skinned in the searching-room, but just laughed at the inspectors and walked out—to dispose of the jewels at his convenience. That fellow owes the government of the United States two hundred thousand dollars, if he owes a cent. Now he's got the Servian ruby and Uncle Sam wants his share of the profits. Know anything about that ruby, Hanson?"

I acknowledged that my knowledge of the crown jewels of Servia, collectively or individually, was limited.

"Well," the chief continued, "the ruby which our friend Lowenberg has in his possession has not a peer, if indeed an equal, in this country. You know how the king and queen of Servia met their death, and you have heard how the queen's jewels went to her family; the ruby was properly numbered among the crown gems, but had become the personal property of Queen Draga. With the others, left to her relatives, it was put on the market, and it appears that Mr. M. Lowenberg has purchased it and will bring it to this country. I won't venture to state the probable value of the gem; I don't know, but what I do know is that it must come in in the regular way."

"Of course Lowenberg will try to smuggle it," I ventured.

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"That goes without saying—he will try; and he'll fool the customs inspectors, as he's done dozens of times before. The Secretary of the Treasury and I have had a little talk over the matter, and it's been decided I put one of the department agents on the affair. I want you to catch Lowenberg with the goods on, Hanson; catch him if you have to follow him across the States to 'Frisco."

He picked up a memorandum.

"The Pomerania is due to reach New York some time to-morrow morning; she may come up early, or perhaps not for several hours after she's expected. You will be on hand when she lays alongside the pier; Lowenberg will be searched; he'll expect to be, but the chances are a hundred to one that the inspectors won't find anything in the nature of a ruby on him. I've assured the secretary we will be more fortunate; in fact, between ourselves, there's a little dinner up on the issue. Wire me from New York when you reach there, and keep me informed as to your movements. You see, I don't expect you'll get the ruby right under the customs officials' noses; we don't want to be too hard on the secretary."

He wheeled about in his chair, a sign that the interview was ended.

As I opened the door and stepped into the outer office, I heard him strike a match to relight his cigar, which had gone out during the delivery of his instructions; the secretary was buttoning up his overcoat.

"Lost your dinner?" asked he pleasantly, and I saw a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"The chief has asked me to postpone it until next week, when I'm to dine with him," I replied laconically, and hurried away to get my hat and overcoat.

It lacked but three quarters of an hour before the express left for New York.

I dined aboard the train instead of at the Arlington, and afterward smoked three cigars while thinking over the task before me.

I had tackled plenty of difficult cases during my seven years' connection with the secret service, and did not fool myself with the idea that the one in hand would prove easier than a dozen others

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which had kept me on the jump, and my wits at the highest tension.

I was perfectly familiar with Mr. M. Lowenberg, by reputation, and knew a man would have to be up pretty early in the morning to get ahead of him. So phenomenal had been his career as a successful smuggler of jewels that it was commonly reported among the customs officials that he was in league with his Satanic majesty in person.

It was known beyond a doubt that he had time and time again brought valuable gems into the country, but no evidence was forthcoming on which the authorities could act. He traveled under his own name; he was too well known to do otherwise. Confident in his own shrewdness, he made no pretense of dodging the government agents —until the moment arrived when he wished to dispose of the smuggled jewels; then he vanished completely.

At first the customs people had tried the old scheme of having him shadowed by an agent, who booked as a first cabin passenger across the Atlantic; three or four such experiments convinced them that Mr. M. Lowenberg was not to be caught that way.

Other methods, which I am not at liberty to state, were employed, and failed. The prince of smugglers had never paid one cent of duty, or a dollar in fines, on any article which he saw fit not to declare in the regular way.

And this was the man I was expected to relieve of a gem to the smuggling of which he would give extra care.

It was shortly after midnight when I reached the metropolis, and my first care was to ascertain if the incoming Cunarder had been sighted.

Having assured myself that she could not possibly reach her pier before nine or ten o'clock in the morning, I went to a hotel convenient to her landing-place, and, leaving orders to be called at six, went to bed to obtain the five hours' sleep permitted me.

Shortly after seven I was upon the pier, and in consultation with the chief inspector, who had come down early as a mark of respect to Mr. M. Lowenberg. From him I obtained all the information available about my man, and the more I learned, the more convinced I became that I had no light task before me.

"You will search him, of course?" said I.

The inspector smiled.

"If he's got that ruby aboard we'll get it; if we don't, you can take the first train back to Washington, for there'll be nothing doing in that direction," he answered with conviction.

I could see he felt a little sore because the Secret Service Department had sent a man to help him, and a good deal sorer because Lowenberg had slipped through his fingers so many times.

It struck me that if our friend had the jewel on his person, he stood a fair chance of losing it, for the customs people were determined to find something this time.

I sent a wire to the chief, announcing my safe arrival on the pier, then accepted the inspector's invitation to a short stroll along the river front, when we smoked and talked over some of the tricks employed by persons who made it a business of trying to cheat Uncle Sam.

We had received word that the ship would reach the pier at a quarter to ten o'clock, and as it neared that hour I mingled with the crowd which thronged the vast enclosure. It was not my purpose to allow M. Lowenberg to catch sight of me, but I should be where I could keep my eye on *him*.

There is a small closet in the customs' searching room, with two small gimlet holes bored through the door; as the great ship swung against the pier, and the dock-hands were getting the gang-planks in place, I edged toward the customs' office, but retained a position from whence I could see every person who descended from the ship to the level on which I stood.

The inspector had boarded the Pomerania almost before the gang planks were in place, and I plainly saw him upon one of the upper decks, talking with a man who afterwards turned out to be one of the customs agents who had gone down the bay and boarded the ship from the revenue cutter; from the moment this man climbed over the Pomerania's rail, Mr. Lowenberg was

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under the observation of the United States' authorities.

Presently I saw the inspector disappear, while the agent with whom he had been talking took his position at the head of the gangplank down which the first cabin passengers must pass to reach the pier.

They began to pour out fast enough; first one or two, then half a dozen in a bunch, then so many the gangplank was packed from rail to rail.

It seemed to me that the first cabin must have emptied itself when I saw the inspector reappear at one of the doors on the third deck; close beside him was a thick-set, smooth-shaven man in a suit of brown Scotch tweed, whose face was beaming with good nature and the anticipation of landing on his native soil.

In one hand he carried a small valise, and in the other a bundle of canes.

Had I not received a private signal from the inspector it would have been hard for me to believe that the man at his side was the famous smuggler of valuable gems.

He must have known why the inspector was there and had hunted him up before he left the ship; he was touching elbows with his sworn and natural enemy, yet his manner denoted one who had met a long absent friend, and the expression upon his round face was one of perfect satisfaction.

I knew that Mr. Lowenberg would not be detained upon the pier, so dodged into the office, passed through it to the searching-room, and took my place in the little closet, that I might be ready for what was to follow.

It was not many minutes before the inspector, followed by the man I was to watch, and two subordinates, entered the outer office. The door between that and the searching-room was open, and I caught Mr. Lowenberg's first words.

"Familiar quarters, hey, inspector? I've been in here, let me see, just seventeen times before. 'Pon my word, you've a new carpet on the floor, but the government should have gone further and given you new furniture; shabby, shabby, sir; I've half a mind to present you with a set myself."

"Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Lowenberg," came in the inspector's voice, "but you see it will be necessary to detain you for a short time. You have declared——"

I heard my man's short laugh.

"Twenty yards of silk; that's for my wife, inspector. Three dozen pairs of gloves—lady friends, you know. Twelve yards of lace, a dozen bottles of French wine, and three small emeralds. Didn't bring much over this trip; going back next month, so came light this time. Ah, here are the men with my trunk; and here's the key."

There was the shuffling of feet in the office, and the sound of a heavy object being deposited upon the floor.

"This is, I believe, your sworn statement of all dutiable articles, Mr. Lowenberg?" asked the inspector somewhat sharply.

"There, in your hand," replied the other pleasantly; "and, oh, by the way, heard of the piece of luck I had on the other side? Got a chance at one of the jewels formerly the property of the late Queen Draga, of Servia; as fine a ruby as you ever saw, inspector. Wish I could have shown it to you; bought it for a song, and disposed of it for—but I'm not giving that away. Ever heard of the Servian ruby, inspector?"

"I think I have—something," replied the official dryly. "Do you know, Mr. Lowenberg, there is a report current that the ruby may find its way to America?"

"Don't you believe it!" cried the other. "Not in a hundred years."

"You sold the gem?"

"Sure! I'd be a fool to lug it over here and pay the heavy duty. I was offered my price in London and took it."

"Got the bill of sale?"—the inspector's tone was cutting.

I heard the rustle of paper, then the voice of Mr. Lowenberg.

"There she is; don't give the price away, inspector. And say, did you think I had *that* on me?" and he laughed heartily.

"I think we'll have to put you to the inconvenience of a little examination." The inspector's tone was purely official now.

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"Deucedly awkward," quoth Mr. Lowenberg, "but really, I suppose I can't object; and then I've had so many examinations before, you know; comes sort of natural, and amuses the government, I fancy. I'd bluster if it was of any use, but I know you gentlemen; blamed nice country, isn't it? Insults its citizens in the most brazen fashion. We've got to grin and bear it, eh, inspector?"

I heard the click of the lock as they opened the trunk; then followed a running comment by Lowenberg as the customs officials went through each article.

"False bottom! Not a bit of it," cried the owner. "There, didn't I tell you so."

There was a sharp snap, followed by another, and a third.

"Hang it, why did you break those canes? Thought they were hollow, did you? I'll put in a bill for those articles." Mr. Lowenberg's voice sounded a trifle angry. Then:

"Oh, the valise! Of course; can't you see it isn't locked? Any duty on that toothbrush, or the flask? Good stuff in it, my word on it; try a mouthful. No? Then perhaps you other fellows will; isn't poisoned. The best I could get on the ship."

"I think I'll have to ask you to step into this room for a moment." The inspector's voice had assumed the tone of command.

Looking through the gimlet holes, I saw Mr. Lowenberg cross the threshold into the little searching-room; the inspector followed, then one of his assistants. The latter closed the door.

Without a word, Lowenberg removed his coat and handed it to the inspector; when the latter had finished with the garment there wasn't an inch of cloth or lining which had not passed under his nimble fingers.

"Want me to strip? It's a devilish outrage, sir; catch me voting the Republican ticket again; not if I know myself."

Mr. Lowenberg was stripping off his waistcoat and swearing softly.

I can testify that the inspector and his assistant can never be accused of carelessness in that examination; during the process their victim growled and cursed the government from top to bottom, but under it all his face wore a sarcastic, satisfied smile. When it was over he gave a shiver, like a man stricken with the ague.

"I'll get my death from this," growled he. "Get me that brandy flask, will you? I'm frozen stiff with all this tomfoolery."

The customs' agent went into the other room and returned with the brandy flask. Mr. Lowenberg drained it in three gulps.

"Here," said he, proffering it to the inspector; "I don't hold any ill-will against *you* for this dirty business. Accept the flask in kindly remembrance of—— No? I forgot it was against orders. Are you through with me?"

He got into his clothes slowly, thrust the empty flask into his pocket and turned to the door, There was a look of disappointment on the inspector's face, but the man who had been searched took no notice of it. I heard him repacking his things in the outer office.

"Do you know, inspector," said he, half humorously, "I'm almost sorry I didn't bring that ruby over, so you fellows could find it on me; a lot of trouble for nothing, eh? Well, better luck next time."

I stepped out of the closet. The inspector's face wore a dark frown.

"The same old story," said he disgustedly; "now you can try your hand, Hanson, but you won't get that ruby—because the man hasn't got it on him; not unless he swallowed it."

I did not stop to exchange views on the subject, but in my heart I believed the inspector was right. Yet it was my business to keep Mr. M. Lowenberg in sight, and I proposed to do it.

I found him just on the point of climbing into a cab. His trunk was up in front, and I heard him say sharply:

"The Manhattan."

The cab rattled off. I jumped into another; ordered the driver to keep close behind the one in front, lighted a cigar, and sat back in the seat, so I could keep my eye on the vehicle which contained my man.

In something about half an hour his cab pulled up before the entrance of

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the Manhattan. I waited for him to get well inside, then paid my own driver and followed.

My man was leaning over the desk in the office.

"Want to get the one:thirty train for the West," he was saying to the clerk, "so will only take lunch with you this trip. Have my trunk checked on to Chicago; I'll get the ticket presently."

For the next two hours I followed him about, keeping as much out of sight as possible.

He purchased a ticket and section for Chicago on the one:thirty limited. I did the same, getting the berth directly opposite his. He went into the café, got a drink, and had his flask refilled. Then he bought a paper and strolled into the lunch-room.

I took a seat at a table a few yards away and timed myself so I finished a few moments before he did. While he was talking to the clerk at the desk, I took the opportunity to dash off a telegram to the chief, informing him I was *en route* for Chicago, on Lowenberg's heels.

I had left the dress-suit case I brought from Washington in the cloak room; I got it just in time to follow my man from the hotel to the Grand Central Station, a block away.

I saw him get into the sleeper, and fooled around near the car door until the train began to pull out; then I jumped aboard, strolled down the aisle, and dropped carelessly into the seat just across the way from him.

We had got well out of the tunnel and past Mott Haven when Mr. Lowenberg opened his valise and began to fumble among its contents. Presently he began to swear softly to himself, and, catching my eye, remarked savagely:

"Talk about vandalism, my friend; do you see that?"

He pointed to the lining of the traveling bag, which had been literally pulled to pieces.

I leaned over and examined the wreck.

"Sneak thieves? One cannot be too careful about leaving things in those hotel rooms," I suggested.

"Sneak thieves be blamed," said he; "worse than sneak thieves; that came through the customs this morning. I shall report it to the proper officials in Washington; I'll teach them not to ruin a United States citizen's property with impunity."

It was a good opening, and I exhibited the proper amount of ignorance in the tribulations of the European traveler returning to his native land.

My companion spoke feelingly on the subject, and we conversed, across the aisle, for half an hour. Then he produced a novel and I turned my attention to the scenery along the Hudson.

It was after leaving Utica that I again came into close contact with the man I was shadowing.

I had settled down to the firm conviction that the chase was to be a strenuous one, and pictured to myself the unwelcome task of following Mr. Lowenberg from point to point, until I should convince myself, and incidentally the chief, that he had really disposed of the gem in England.

How long this would take, circumstances could alone determine.

The express was rushing through the darkness between Utica and Rome when I strolled into the smoking-compartment. The little room was already occupied by Mr. Lowenberg, an elderly gentleman, who was nodding in the corner, and two young men hot in the discussion of the respective merits of the three foremost college football teams.

Lowenberg was puffing indolently at a black cigar, and nodded carelessly as I took the vacant seat opposite him. Presently one of the young men appealed to us on a point which they were arguing, and after a little the conversation became general.

Mr. Lowenberg was a good talker, and, being an extensive traveler, entertained us with reminiscences of the various countries he had visited. He had just finished a stirring tale of an adventure in the Balkans when one of the young men made a dive for his hip pocket.

"By Jove," said he, "this night riding always makes one dry! I was going to offer you gentlemen a drink, but I must have left my flask in the berth."

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He had half arisen, with the ostensible intention of repairing the error, when Mr. Lowenberg waved him to his seat.

"Try this!" said he carelessly, and produced the flask which I had seen him have filled at the hotel.

The youth accepted it, unscrewed the silver cup, which formed the stopper, and poured out a generous drink of the liquor; then passed the flask and empty cup to his companion.

The old gentleman in the corner was snoring softly, and I was next in line. It has always been my habit to mix water with my whisky, and with the flask in my hand, I arose and stepped to the cooler.

I must have been extremely awkward, or perhaps it was the sudden curve in the line. As I reached forward to turn the faucet, the flask slipped from my grasp, pitched toward the window, struck the sill, and dropped squarely upon the iron pipe which ran along the side of the car close to the floor.

I heard the jingle of broken glass, and uttered an exclamation, when a sudden movement and a fierce oath on the part of Mr. Lowenberg drew my attention to him.

Now, the breaking of a brandy flask is really not such a serious matter, but the look upon the man's face could not have shown more consternation had I tossed his well filled wallet out of the window.

It might have been an inspiration, or perhaps just bull-headed luck, but a sudden, startling idea flashed through my brain.

As the owner of the broken flask darted forward to snatch it from the floor, I put my foot squarely upon the flattened leather case.

A fierce oath burst from Lowenberg's lips.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "You almost stepped on my fingers. Take your foot off my property!"

I think he must have realized why I had prevented him from getting the flask, and that he suspected what I was. A look of desperation flashed into his eyes, and he made a half motion toward the inner pocket of his coat.

In an instant I had my own revolver out and covered him.

"Will one of you kindly pick up that flask and give it to me," I said sternly to the amazed young men; but it was the old gentleman in the corner who stooped down and drew the leather case from under my foot.

Lowenberg made a grab for it, missed, and I pushed him back upon his seat.

"I am a member of the United States Secret Service force," said I quietly to the old gentleman; "this man is a noted smuggler of gems, and I have followed him from New York, where he landed this morning. Will you oblige me, sir, by taking your penknife and ripping open the case which covers that flask?"

"If you do, I'll have the law on you for molesting my property," cried Lowenberg savagely.

The old gentleman already had his penknife out, and with a few quick cuts ripped open the leather case from top to bottom.

A half dozen pieces of broken glass clattered to the floor; then my assistant drew out the heavy piece which had formed the bottom of the flask, and placed it in my hand.

I heard Lowenberg groan. A glance told me why.

The bottom of the flask was an inch or more in thickness, and made of rosy-tinted glass. In the center sparkled a light red lump, the great ruby of the late Queen Draga of Servia.

M. Lowenberg had taken the gem to a skilled glass blower, and the latter had cleverly blown the liquor flask from glass of a similar color, imbedding the jewel in the thick bottom.

It would have been next to impossible to detect the trick unless the flask was broken and the bottom examined separately.

The train was approaching the suburbs of Syracuse. I put the piece of broken glass into the inner pocket of my coat and buttoned the garment across my chest. Then I replaced my revolver in my pocket and looked at Mr. Lowenberg.

"Well," said he doggedly, "you've done the trick, and I throw up my

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hands. I'm not going to run for it, or skulk out of the country; I'm going to wait and get even with you, my fine fellow, if it takes twenty years."

"I think," said I calmly, "that we had best postpone our trip to Chicago; there will be a train leaving Syracuse for New York some time to-night."

"Right you are," rejoined Mr. Lowenberg laconically, and lighted a fresh cigar.

And the old gentleman who had followed my instructions so readily? He was an ex-inspector of the Scotland Yard force, traveling in this country for his health, and he had known about Lowenberg on the other side; recognized him the moment he entered the smoking compartment.

The chief says he owes me a dinner. You see, I wasn't invited to the one the secretary lost on that ruby affair.

THE FOOL'S POCKET.*

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

The man who was missing, and the extraordinary spot in which he was finally found.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE story is told in the main by Benjamin Hubbard, an old man of seventy-five, senior partner in the law firm of Hubbard, Ayer & Waterhouse. They have charge of the affairs of the hero, Lynn Shepard, the boy and his sister Lillian having been left orphans. Lynn's father was interested in a mine out West, the Fool's Pocket, in which Lynn still has confidence, although it was reported to be worked out. He borrows money from the Gregorys, father and son, in whose store he works as a clerk, to go out and make a personal inspection of the mine. He finds it will pay to work it, but before he can do this he must obtain permission of the other partner with his father in the investment, Preston Shaw, who was a rascal and has mysteriously disappeared. If Lynn cannot start work within a certain period, covered by his loan from the Gregorys, his claim on it will revert to them. In this crisis, he learns that Preston Shaw's sister Mary is living in England with the Hawleys. Jethro Hawley had been associated with Shaw and Shepard in the mine deal.

Lynn sails for England, contrives to render a service to Hawley (son of Jethro), a blacksmith possessed of mysterious wealth and who claims that Mary Shaw is weak in intellect. Lynn, who passes under his first name, takes more than a keen interest in the daughter, pretty Bertha Hawley, who tells him strange tales about a diving bell, an unfinished invention of her grandfather. But one day who should turn up in the town but Christopher Gregory, traveling in an automobile with his friend, Orrin Levering. Captain Englebock, of the Susannah, fresh from one of her mysterious voyages, also arrives, and proves to be a confidential business associate of Jackson Hawley. Through Gregory, the latter discovers that Lynn's last name is Shepard, and not Lynn. He turns on the young man with great vehemence, and orders him out of the house, but what cuts Lynn more than all else is Englebock's declaration, made in the same moment, that Bertha is his affianced wife—by the long since expressed wishes of her father.

CHAPTER X.

THE TINKER'S STORY.

JACKSON HAWLEY'S execrations followed the young man as he stumbled along the well-shaded road toward the village.

It was immaterial to Lynn whether the strident voice of the smith was heard by others or no. He was not even conscious of the cessation of his tones and his disappearance from the garden gate.

The thing which startled him into a consciousness of his surroundings was the fact that somebody came along by his side and jogged his elbow.

"How noo? How noo, maister?" exclaimed a mellow voice, and Lynn stared at the red, sharp face of the speaker.

"Come, come! Sit ye doon—so. Fegs, but ye're in a bad way! Did yon black-hearted scoondrel set the dogs on ye?"

Lynn found himself eased to a seat on the grassy bank beyond the Hawley place before he could explain. His offi-

**This story began in the May issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

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cious new acquaintance carried a bundle of canes and a little charcoal stove. He was plainly a traveling tinker—the forerunner of the American tramp.

"He set no dogs on me," Lynn said slowly. "I tore my clothing and hurt my hands last night. It was an accident."

"Ah, but that Jackson Hawley would belike set dogs on ye, did he dare. Ye're a gentleman, maister. Ah see that. He'd not dare treat ye as he'd treat the like o' me.

"No, nor as he'd treated mony a poor man," pursued the tinker, warming to his reminiscence of the smith. "He's hard—hard as nails! We all knows him. Sure, 'twas only a few days since, they tell me, that he sent a poor lad to jail. An' he's like to get a long term for 'tackin' him—the bloody old reskil!

"He treats a man that bad that he can't stand his meanness longer, an' then he takes the law to him. An' Morgan was as likely a lad as ever shook a foot on the road. Ah know him, maister."

"This black Morgan, you mean?" asked Lynn, suddenly looking up.

"Aye. Black he is in look. But a real jolly lad. An' he knew Jackson Hawley too well. That's the matter! He knew him too well.

"It was Morgan that went a v'y'ge on yon Susannah that lays beyant Padstow this very day. I see her as I came through. And Morgan might tell more than he has about Hawley an' that long-legged capting. That is what the row was about, I warrant ye, an' why the lad's in jail this day."

"What does he know of the Susannah?" queried Lynn, his interest now awakened.

"Sure, Morgan's a close-mouthed lad. But once in his cups I heard him drop some things that set us all thinking. Aye, indeed.

"Who ever knew how Jackson Hawley got his money, maister? My feyther lived in this very borough. He knowed old Jethro Hawley—a poor fool of a man who wasted his money in dickerin's that ne'er amounted to a shillin' for his family. The Hawleys was dirt poor after old Jethro run away.

"And then, by and by, when Jackson got up to be a man, he suddenly gets rich. How does he do it? Honest, says you? Nay, nay!

"Men don't come by sudden riches honest. Leastways, *I* never did.

"An' when they sees this Susannah come here to anchor, an' her black-faced captain hobnobbing with Jackson Hawley, folks has got a right to talk!"

"Suspicions prove nothing," Lynn declared carelessly. But he kept his eyes turned from the tinker.

"An' that's so. But Black Morgan knows a lot he won't tell. I say he's been a v'y'ge on the Susannah—to Halifax and back by way o' Denmark. Then he was kicked out. They found he was too sharp belike."

"Too sharp for what?"

"To be of use to 'em, I suppose. Ah, maister, there's them that says the Susannah carries a cargo that never sees the mark of the customs officers. And what Morgan let drop that time——"

"What was it?"

"Why, sir," and the tinker drew closer and grew more confidential, "it was like this: Morgan sailed from Padstow in her—like to-night. She got out of the channel and set across the great say for Ameriky.

"But sometimes she sailed swift, an' sometimes she lay to, as they calls it, with the sails all tied down. It was no reg'lar voyage where most captings like to get to port as quick as maybe, I take it.

"And then one day, after the capting had squinted through a spyglass at the sun, an' figured a lot on a slate to find out just where they was—I heerd other sailor men tellin' about such doin's, maister—the Susannah lay on the sea like as though she'd reached some place they'd been lookin' for.

"Morgan warn't over friendly with the others aboord, I take it. He warn't one o' they, ye see. An' come night he was sent down into the cubbyhole where the sailors sleep.

"But he doesn't sleep, and after dark he seen them pitch some boxes an' casks over the ship's side, an' every one of them had a big stone taken up from the ballast tied to it—like as though it was a kedge.

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"Then the Susannah sails away from that place an' leaves the casks and boxes bobbing about on the say—an' not a livin' thing, nor a sail in sight but their own."

"A strange proceeding, indeed," Lynn said gravely.

"Warn't it? An' they suspected Morgan mayhap of spyin' on them. So he on'y went one v'y'ge. Have ye a bit of 'baccy about ye, maister?"

Lynn gave him a coin and rose to go on to the village. The story had startled his brain to activity again. The tinker hobbled on beside him.

"But he ain't shut Black Morgan up for good—nay!" he said, chuckling. "There's many a good lad knows Morgan and owes him a good turn. He'll never see 'sizes."

"Do you mean he will be bailed out?" asked Lynn suddenly.

"Never mind what I means, maister," said the tinker, grinning. "But he'll not be transported for this row—see if he be!"

He turned into a yard then to ply his trade, and Lynn hurried on to the inn amid the curious stares of the townspeople.

But he did not notice them. His mind was too busy with other thoughts to remark the tattered state of his clothing, or the fact that he was hatless and coatless.

He went to his room at once, ordered a bath, and as he laid out clean clothes his brain was still engaged with the elusive threads of this mystery of the Shaw-Hawley combine.

It was no idle curiosity that had shaken him out of that state of stunned despair in which he had left the smith's abode.

Something beside his own desires were at stake in this matter. He had not come to England alone to help himself.

There was Lillian's rights to be thought of. His mind had been so taken up with thoughts of Miss Bertha Hawley that he had near forgotten his sister. Now this tinker's tale had set his mind afire again.

Englebock had admitted the night before that Preston Shaw was still alive. Mary Shaw herself evidently believed her brother in the land of the living, too.

And here Hawley, in his rage, had accused Lynn of trying to ruin him. *How could Jackson Hawley be ruined in connection with the discovery of Shaw?*

The question was a staggerer. But Lynn grappled with it.

As he thought, his mind waxed clearer. Hawley and Englebock were surely partners in some scheme which included a division of some of Shaw's money. It was from this partnership, legal or otherwise, that Hawley obtained his wealth.

And the story told by the tinker of what Black Morgan had seen when he went a voyage in the Susannah, pointed still more strongly to the fact that the bark was engaged in some trade which, to say the least, was peculiar. Why had that portion of the cargo been jettisoned in mid-ocean?

And the bark usually sailed for Halifax from Padstow, and back again to Denmark. He had thought Englebock to be a Dane.

"There is more to learn about this business. But I have queered myself here," thought Lynn. "I cannot approach Hawley, nor shall I be able again to see Mary Shaw. Of course, Miss Hawley is out of the question," and he became dejected again.

At last: "Well, my best game is to try the other points at which the Susannah touches. I'll go to Halifax. That seems the most reasonable, I believe. I'll see what is known of Englebock and his vessel there."

He found a traveler's guide and began to hunt for a ship to Halifax. The best he could do, he found, would be to wire for a stateroom on the Culloden, a freight and passenger steamer, which sailed in four days from Liverpool.

But he would not leave Pebbleton yet. He kept away from the Hawley premises; but he remained at the inn—was it in hopes that fate would give him another interview with Miss Bertha? If so, he did not admit the fact to himself.

He did not lack for news, however, in keeping close to the inn. It was a center for all the gossip of the countryside, and his host considered it his duty

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to detail everything which went on to his most important guest.

He learned that the Susannah still remained in the roadstead at Padstow, although she seldom stayed there more than two days and a night. Lynn decided that Captain Englebock was keeping watch of *him* and thereby detaining his ship.

The seamen of the Susannah were never allowed ashore at Padstow, or Lynn would have been tempted to go over to the port and see what he could make of them.

He learned, too, that Chris Gregory was a guest of Mr. Hawley. They rode together and were seen about the shops in close conversation.

Evidently the smith had opened his heart to the other American, after having turned Lynn down.

Then one morning—the very morning of the day he proposed to go to Liverpool—Lynn received from a shy-looking small boy a perfumed note which he knew, with a tightening about his heart, came from Miss Hawley. He opened it in the secrecy of his room at the inn.

It was very brief, and was couched in language simply friendly in tone; but why had she written him at all if there was not something deeper behind this friendly feeling she expressed?

Youth clutches at the shadow of hope merely—it does not wait for the substance. When a man has seen the phantoms of youth fade—even the realities of middle life disappear—and has arrived at the mellow age when he stands ready to take even truth itself "with a grain of salt," he may then perhaps judge a woman's mind and motives. But not before!

MY DEAR MR. SHEPARD:

I learn that you are still in our vicinity. I wish I might see you again before I go away; but it will be impossible. It has been decided that I shall take a short sea voyage, and the Susannah waits my pleasure at Padstow. I shall sail in her to Halifax, possibly returning by steamship from there, although Captain Englebock assures me that his cabin is most comfortable and that I, with my maid Fidelia, will have a pleasant voyage on his bark.

I hope to meet you again when this unpleasant matter has blown over. And believe me, Ever your friend,

BERTHA HAWLEY.

But Lynn suffered a pang of jealousy with his joy at receipt of the letter, too. He had not forgotten Englebock's statement that the girl was his promised bride.

"Yet, if she really looked at herself as such, would she have spoken in this way to me?" he asked himself, and he refused to see the blacker side of the matter.

Lynn had engaged a conveyance in which to drive cross country to the railroad, and he started soon after receiving the note. As he left the inn the host put a copy of the Padstow *Mercury* in his hand.

Not until after he was in the train and speeding northward did he unfold this paper and fall upon an article which quite startled him after the story of the tinker whom he had met on the Pebbleton road.

I have a clipping of the aforesaid article which, of course, reached me from quite a different source, and as it so deeply interested Lynn Shepard, it may likewise be of interest to the reader.

A JAIL DELIVERY.

News has been received just as the *Mercury* goes to press that the man called Black Morgan, who was held by Mr. Justice Maunders last week for an attack upon Mr. Jackson Hawley of the borough of Pebbleton, has escaped from confinement. He would have gone to trial next month, and the case, being a particularly atrocious one of assault, the prisoner would doubtless have received the limit of the punishment accorded such a crime.

Details of the delivery are lacking; but it is understood that the prison authorities have their suspicions that the man was spirited away by friends both inside and out of the jail. If this is so, we hope the proper punishment will be meted out to these persons, and that the man himself may be quickly recaptured.

He is a dangerous fellow to allow at large, and Cornwall has been cursed in times past by too many escaped jailbirds, who have made their lairs in the wilder part of the country and continued careers of crime. Morgan's threats, too, at his examination, have not been forgotten by many who were there at the time,

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and it is understood that the authorities will detail a special constable to watch Mr. Hawley's premises and to guard that gentleman until it is known what has become of the missing man.

Lynn could not help being rather thankful that he had got away from Pebbleton as he did, after reading this article. He was not anxious to cross the path of Black Morgan again.

Arriving in Liverpool, Lynn, who had been too disturbed and down-hearted to write us since the last letter, of which I gave the reader a glimpse, cabled me that he was starting in the Culloden for Halifax and that I should hear from him when he arrived at that port.

Then he went aboard, after buying some necessities that he had been needing for several days, as his trunk was still in London at the warehouses of the steamship company. The Culloden sailed in the early morning, and Lynn was up betimes to see her departure.

Some few belated passengers were coming aboard when he reached the deck; but the last of the freight was off the wharf. Two of these late comers attracted Lynn's attention, and before they reached the deck he recognized one of them.

It was Chris Gregory, and with him was a man whose face Lynn could not see, but who stuck to the son of Garford's moneyed man like a leach. They evidently did not observe Lynn watching them, and both went immediately below as the steamship swung into the Mersey.

CHAPTER XI.

A DESPERATE CHANCE.

It is borne in upon my mind more and more as I grow older that the best way to misjudge my fellow men is to trust unreservedly to appearances. Only the fool or the utterly reckless looks to be what he really is.

Mr. Christopher Gregory was a very mild looking villain for a strenuous novel, for instance; but somewhere inside his pudgy, ill-shapen body there was rolled the elements which, in an evil inspired man, were bound to expand into something abnormally bad.

He had come upon the scene at Pebbleton just in time to make Lynn Shepard an astonishing lot of trouble.

And aside from the fact that he had made it impossible for Lynn to come to an amicable understanding with those who seemed to have in their power the government of Preston Shaw's interest in the Fool's Pocket Mine, and thereby made his securing of Lynn's and his sister's share in the gold reef for his own almost certain, Chris positively enjoyed the discomfiture of our boy!

He had hated Lynn from the days when they went to school together. Why does a warped, mean nature always hate a frank, whole-souled one?

Chris stood in that breakfast-room of the Hawley House and beheld Lynn driven forth with absolute delight. Only the glance his old acquaintance had turned on him caused him to shiver a bit. The Shepards made rather bad enemies when fully roused—as Preston Shaw had realized long before Chris Gregory's day.

But Chris was long-headed. He knew well enough now what Lynn had come way to this little Cornwell village for.

The title of the Fool's Pocket Mine was in doubt, and he had learned through his agents, as well as Lynn had, that a series of suits would be necessary to establish the claim of the heirs of James Shepard to half of the mine, unless the owners of the other half would freely and frankly admit the said claims.

He saw at once that, if the Shepards' share fell into his and his father's hands, as now seemed probable, it would save both time and money if the owners of the Shaw half of the mine stood ready to admit the Shepard claim just.

And from what he had learned, together with what he had guessed, Jackson Hawley seemed to Chris to be the very person who could the easiest bring about this amicable settlement. Therefore he cultivated Mr. Jackson Hawley's acquaintance.

Before that memorable forenoon on which Lynn had left the Hawley house in disgrace had passed, Jackson Hawley was in possession of very many facts regarding the new find of gold in the Fool's Pocket, and of the intentions of

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Lynn Shepard in coming here to Cornwall.

These details were sufficient to stir the smith's imagination to the furthest limit (never was there a man so sordid and practical that he could not have golden dreams) and yet meager enough for Chris to retain the upper hand in affairs as they developed. The son of Jason Gregory proved himself a shrewd villain at every move in the game.

Whatever Jackson Hawley's relations were to the missing Preston Shaw, to his sister, and to Captain Englebock, he evidently saw an opportunity in the event of these circumstances, to vastly increase his own private wealth. He showed plainly that he desired to keep the knowledge of these things from the commander of the Susannah, whose influence with Preston Shaw he perhaps feared.

Chris found himself at once much sought after by the Pebbleton smith and wheelwright. Nothing would do but Mr. Gregory must remain at the big house rather than take up his abode at the inn with his brother American.

Hawley did not suspect that the last desire Gregory had in this world was to be left alone with Lynn. Chris accepted his invitation with alacrity.

And yet, for the few days he remained at the big house, Chris eliminated himself as much as possible, only being at Mr. Hawley's beck and call when that great man wished for his society.

He made no headway with Bertha, and after being snubbed once he kept out of her way. He saw that she believed in Lynn, and knew that he was really the cause of the other American's overthrow.

Englebock had little to say to him. He moodily hung about while he kept one eye furtively upon Miss Bertha's comings and goings, and the other undoubtedly was wide awake for any approaches by Lynn Shepard. Meantime the family decided upon Bertha's sea voyage.

Even Jackson Hawley himself did not dare talk to her upon the subject of the banished American; but while Lynn hung about the Pebbleton tavern it was much better to send Bertha away. And Englebock's vessel was providentially at Padistow.

So the girl's outfit was prepared, and her maid—a faithful woman who had been her nurse when she was a child—was to accompany her.

"We'll break up any foolishness there might have been between this Shepard and the girl," quoth Jackson Hawley.

It was planned for the Susannah to sail at sunset of the very day which Lynn had wired for a stateroom on board the Culloden. But the Hawleys and Englebock did not know that Shepard had any intention of leaving Pebbleton.

What Chris knew he did not tell. He did not care to go to the inn, but he knew when Lynn wired for his passage and he went off to Padstow within the hour and telegraphed for a stateroom on the same steamship.

He could not yet afford to lose sight of Lynn entirely. There is often a slip 'twixt cup and lip—and Chris Gregory was not a fellow to take chances.

But he went over to Padstow with the family to see Bertha on board the Susannah without telling anybody *why* he himself intended starting for Liverpool that very night in Levering's motor car, which had been sent over for him with the regular chauffeur.

To Jackson Hawley Chris stated that he must get back to the States as soon as possible so as to "watch things there"—a vague statement that the smith did not seek to fathom. He was too eagerly anxious to work matters in his own favor to probe very deeply into Gregory's actions.

"Come on with me, Mr. Gregory," the smith said, when Bertha and Englebock had been rowed out to the Susannah. "You're going so quickly that I've got a lot to say to you. We'll walk back and so have time to talk undisturbed."

As they left the port, Hawley was annoyed by the appearance of a fellow who slouched along in their rear, keeping within a few yards of the smith and his guest.

"Here, you!" exclaimed Hawley, turning at length upon the man. "What do you want? Why don't you

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go ahead, or else go back? Are you following us?"

"Yes, sir, please your honor!" said the man, ducking his head sheepishly.

"You are?" exclaimed the soon angered smith. "What do you mean by it? Who are you?"

"I'm a special constable an' it please your honor," he said. "I was sent to keep me eye on you because——"

"Yes, yes! I understand!" interrupted Hawley, more mollified. "You go back to Mr. Maunders, or to whoever sent you, and tell 'em I'm much obliged. But I don't need any bodyguard—not this time of day at least. Now go along."

The man hesitated, but the smith's tone was so authoritative that he finally obeyed, and Hawley and Chris walked on. The latter looked curious, and the smith said complacently:

"You can see it is not always pleasant to be a prominent figure in a place like this," and Chris, who had never heard of Black Morgan, had no idea that the constable had been sent to guard his companion against a desperate jail breaker, but thought it was merely a mark of courtesy on the part of the authorities of Padstow to the eminent citizen of Pebbleton.

Freed from any fear of Englebock's sharp eye, Hawley talked very encouragingly indeed to the American. The way he put it, he felt assured that in six months' time he could furnish the Gregorys' with affidavits from the proper people, which would make good the Shepards' title to a half interest in the Fool's Pocket.

The Gregorys' were to be agents of the English owners, too, in opening the new gold reef. Indeed, between them, they planned a very pretty business.

Chris grew enthusiastic and repeated much that the experts who had examined the gold for Lynn had told *him*, and he beat down the bushes beside the path as they strode along with his walking stick.

This walking stick was a heavy affair with a great knob for a head, and when the two men sat down on the roadside bank when they had almost got in sight of the shops, Chris flung the stick beside him and continued his harangue to such good purpose that both Jackson Hawley and himself saw the golden visions grow before them.

Suddenly, however, there was an end of all that. Chris, who was still talking, and had fixed his eyes upon the cattle slowly moving homeward across the plain, was blind as well as deaf to anything behind him.

Hawley was leaning forward, drinking in his words, and licking his chops like a wolf that scents its prey. Instantly—with scarcely a groan—the Pebbleton magnate dropped forward on his hands and knees.

Chris started, for he had heard the impact of some heavy substance against his comrade's skull.

For a second or two of absolute inaction he stared dumbly at the man before him.

The back of Hawley's head was completely crushed in. The blood dyed the earth about him. Then the poor creature dropped on his face and lay supine, his arms stretched out upon either side, the fingers convulsively clutching at the spears of grass.

But soon they were still. Then Chris, getting back his senses, arose to shout.

But he could not. A fierce grip was about his throat, and he was flung heavily upon his back. He was conscious of a terrible face staring into his own.

It was a black face, scarred and distorted. The scars were not wholly healed, and under the rim of the hat he saw strips of surgeon's plaster. The man wagged his jaw oddly when he spoke.

"Breathe a word and I'll serve ye the same," he said. "I know you. You are an American named Christopher Gregory. You have a motor car waiting for you at the Pebbleton inn to take you across country to the railway. You are going north to Liverpool to-night. You will sail to-morrow for America."

Chris grunted and nodded. The pressure on his windpipe relaxed.

"I don't deny it," he whined. "Let up on a fellow."

"Listen to me!" mumbled the man. "That devil yonder is dead. He was killed with your stick. Do you know what will happen to you if you're caught round here?"

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"I—I——"

"Don't talk. You were alone with him. You'll have to explain what happened. You'll be kept here some time—weeks perhaps.

"I know you ain't anxious to do that. You want to get away. You're in a hurry. Otherwise you wouldn't have telegraphed. Isn't that so?"

Gregory nodded.

"Then you'll do what I tell you to do the more easy. You will get up and leave here at once. That old devil will be found soon enough. Don't fear.

"We'll go on to Pebbleton——"

"We!" gasped Chris in horror.

"Yes. I am going with you. I am going to ride with you to the railroad in Levering's car. You will tell Levering that I am your friend.

"And I shall go with you on the train to Liverpool. From the railway station you will wire that you must have another berth—that there is a friend crossing with you——"

"But I won't! I won't!" gasped Chris. "You murderer! You dog!"

His breath was shut off as though by a vise.

"You will!" hissed the man into his ear. "You will do just as I say—everything I say. You will only speak as I tell you. You will do this or—die!"

Chris groaned and gasped again as the breath came back to him. It was true. He knew he should do it. What else was possible?

"I shall go to the ship with you. We will go aboard. The police here will not wake up in time to think of following you until after the ship has sailed.

"I shall be your shadow on the ship. We shall get to America together. Then we will land and I will disappear. In three days you may tell as much or as little as you like. But if you speak before—in the village here, in the motor car, in the train, in Liverpool, on the boat—I'll kill you!

"Make no mistake. Be careful how you act or speak. I shall watch you all the time. At your first movement towards giving me up, I'll kill you. I mean this. Do you understand me?"

Chris nodded again.

"Will you do as I say—and the price to be your life?"

The American looked at that dead thing lying at the foot of the bank and shuddered.

"Yes, yes!" he whispered.

"Then we will go," said the man, rising and dragging Chris to his feet. "This cane we will leave here. It will make you trouble if you don't get out of the country just as quick as God A'mighty lets you!"

Chris staggered along the road toward the village. Night was falling fast and the villagers were at supper. He wanted to scream, but he dared not. He desired to run from this awful creature at his elbow, but the fear of death held him.

He could only march forward, the murderer close to his side, sick, cold, and continually horrified at the thought of the dead man they had left behind.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GRIP OF FEAR.

From some distance along the village street they saw the twinkling lights of the automobile standing before the Pebbleton inn. Levering, who had good-naturedly offered Chris the use of it when he wished to return to the railroad, had sent the car in plenty of season.

"When we get there you shall call to the innkeeper to send the driver of the thing out," growled the man in Gregory's ear. "You must approach the back seat out of range of the lights. If you don't——"

The unfinished threat terrified Chris more than a more elaborately completed one might. The man wrapped a muffler about his throat; it hid his lower jaw, and, with the brim of his hat pulled so far down, made his features almost invisible.

He was dressed roughly, but seemingly better than an ordinary laborer. He did not speak like a poorly educated man, either. Black Morgan had had more advantages than usually fall to the lot of English peasants.

They passed the gate of the Hawley place. The shops were as deserted as they had seemed to Lynn Shepard that night he walked over from Padstow.

On the oddly assorted pair strode,

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into the heart of the village, and up to the inn door.

At that moment it may safely be stated that Chris Gregory did not think of escape from the toils of this madman. His remembrance of Hawley as he lay prone on the earth, the blood pouring from the wound in his head, was too vivid for that.

"Brace up!" commanded the man at his elbow. "Don't act so like a man going to his own hanging. Ugh, how d'ye like the sound of that, eh?"

It evidently affected his own imagination, and he said no more, but his hand gripped Gregory's arm once as they stopped before the car.

"Hey, in there!" shouted the American.

He tried to make his voice sound natural—even a little jovial; but it was a dismal failure. It seemed like a voice crying in a churchyard.

"You got to do better than that or you'll never live to get over the hill out of town!" exclaimed his companion in a fierce whisper.

Nevertheless the chauffeur heard, and he came to the door, wiping his lips, and with the innkeeper and several loungers behind him to see the car off.

"Quick, get into the car!" whispered Morgan. "Tell the man to go ahead instantly."

Chris skipped into the back seat and found his captor beside him on the instant.

"Hurry up, driver!" he stammered.

"We got just a good time to catch the train, sir," the man replied, and came leisurely down and around the auto to the free side of the front seat, where he quite as leisurely got aboard.

The bumpkins hung around. Morgan sat without a word or movement. The crowd stared at the two men on the rear seat in great curiosity, but nobody recognized the muffled Morgan.

The car started slowly. Chris knew that he was being borne off to a frightful adventure, but he could not help himself. He dared not make an outcry.

In a few minutes the lights of Pebbleton were out of sight. They were bowling over the dark roads at express speed. There was little danger of meeting other vehicles on these Cornwall highways after nightfall, and the chauffeur made great time.

The whir of the machine was all that broke the silence of the night as they sped along. Occasionally Chris stole a glance at his captor. The man never moved, but he kept that grip upon the American's arm, and Chris could see his eyes gleam through the dusk.

Morgan's hand seemed in time to become a part of himself. The vise-like grasp never relaxed. It was a continual reminder that he was hopelessly in the power of a demon-inspired enemy.

He wondered if Jackson Hawley had yet been found lying beside the roadside. And had they recognized *his* cane covered with the dead man's blood?

In the strained state of his nerves, he really believed that there was a good chance of the authorities believing that *he* was the murderer! The thought sickened him.

The hue and cry of the countryside would be raised. They would learn that he had taken Levering's auto. The telegraph would be set at work.

Suppose they should send a message to the railway station before the car reached that point? The police might be awaiting them, and then——

Again he glanced at the man beside him. There would be more murder done before this fellow was captured.

Chris trembled to think that perhaps *he* would be sacrificed in the mêlée, and he devoutly hoped that the dead body beside the Pebbleton road would not be found until all chance of overtaking himself and the murderer was past.

Better to travel the thousands of miles to the shores of America in the company of this awful man than to fall a victim to his passionate temper. Chris was a physical coward as well as mentally degenerate.

The miles sped back beneath the wheels of the auto. The lights of the railway town finally came into view. Morgan seemed to awake from a reverie.

"Have the man stop two blocks from the station," he whispered. "I feel your bag under my feet. You will take it as you get out."

It was true, although Chris had quite forgotten it. His dress-suit had been

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secured at the Hawley place by the chauffeur before Chris and his captor arrived at the Pebbleton inn.

Chris obeyed his mentor, and had the auto halted on the street corner.

"Tip the man," whispered the murderer, following him from the car. He seemed to think of everything.

Chris did so. The chauffeur, quite unsuspicious, thanked him, and turned the car about at once. The Levering house, to the young son of which Chris had by some means managed to obtain an introduction, was at the other end of the town.

"Now walk into the station and buy two tickets for Liverpool—first-class. Then go to the telegraph window and send a despatch to the steamship requesting your berth changed to a double room, and that a passage be booked for Mr. James Appleton, of New York. Sign your own name."

Chris had no intention of deviating from these instructions. How could he with Morgan directly at his elbow?

His arm was numb where the man had gripped it all these miles from Pebbleton. He could feel the impression of the other's fingers as plainly as though they were still there.

It seemed to him that they *were* there, as a continual reminder to him not to commit a single error in the program laid out by his captor.

The tickets were purchased without trouble. The wire was sent, although Gregory's hand trembled as he wrote it with Morgan looking over his shoulder.

"Shall I have it repeated back, sir?" asked the young woman at the instrument.

"Tell her 'no,'" whispered his master.

"No," stammered Chris.

"Now go outside and cross the tracks. Stand in the shadow of the shed yonder till the train approaches. Then cross over and enter the first compartment that is opened," were the further orders.

And all these things Chris did. The Old Man of the Sea stuck no closer to Sindbad than this villain did to the shaking Gregory.

Up to the last moment Chris feared that somebody would spring upon them. He was more fearful that they would be stopped now than he was of his future experiences with the man. If Morgan feared likewise, he gave no sign.

The train fled on with them into the night. Every time the tickets were looked at, or the guard opened the door at a station, Chris had a positive chill. His companion sat in the corner of the seat without moving, however.

There was no thought of sleep in Gregory's mind, and the gleam of the other's eyes was ever upon him. Not a motion escaped his observation.

This continual watching drove the prisoner almost frantic. He scarcely dared stir for fear the man would think he contemplated some treachery.

It was near morning when they came into the great bustling station at Liverpool. Chris expected to step out into the arms of a crowd of officers waiting for them both.

But they left the train and the station in perfect safety.

"Take a fly," whispered the fellow, and soon they were jogging down to the docks.

Actually, Chris began to pluck up courage now. They had gone so far without being blocked. He hoped the ship would sail before the authorities traced them.

As we have seen, the two got aboard the Culloden without trouble; nor did either observe Lynn Shepard on the deck.

Chris, indeed, had forgotten all about the man he was following. There was a matter of greater importance on his mind—and that was the query as to whether he was being followed himself.

The purser showed them to their stateroom, and took both their signatures. Before long the ship was towed out of the basin and was soon under her own steam and headed for the channel.

Morgan laid out the plan for the voyage in a few terse words. *He* was supposed to be an invalid. Their meals would therefore be served in their own quarters.

Chris was not to step outside the door unless Morgan went with him. When Morgan wished to sleep he strapped Chris down to his berth and locked the door of the room.

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The outlook was not very pleasant for the home voyage; but what could Chris do? He wondered what would happen when he was seen by Lynn Shepard?

Suppose Lynn should undertake to speak to him in his master's presence? He knew Lynn to be a masterful fellow himself, and as brave as a lion. If he suspected all was not right between Chris and this man he might be able to free him from the awful situation in which he was placed.

Fortunately the weather was not clear, and therefore the fact that Gregory and his companion kept so close to their cabin was not remarked as it would have been had the sun shone.

Once or twice Morgan went on deck about nightfall, leaning on the other's arm. He wore Chris' long traveling coat, and still muffled his face with a black stock.

They took no interest as the other passengers did in the speed of the ship. They did not look at the bulletins written on the blackboard at the foot of the main stairway. They did not buy into the pool which was formed on the hour at which the Culloden would arrive at Halifax.

So they did not know when the mate wrote on the board one day under the latitude and longitude, that the ship was just half way across the Atlantic, nor were they aware that the latitude and longitude marks meant that the Culloden was very near indeed to the situation of that mysterious reef which had been reported by first one and then another seaman for half a century.

They walked on the deck that evening, however. Morgan usually picked out the side of the ship the least frequented by other passengers. This evening he led Chris toward the stern, and upon the port side where but one other figure loomed up against the darkness.

The Culloden left a phosporescent glow in her wake. The sea was not broken, but heaved in long swells like the rising and falling of a woman's bosom in slumber. It was a starless and windless night, and the great vessel throbbed with the jar of her engines at top speed.

The two men, walking arm in arm, took a turn or two about the almost deserted deck. Once they approached quite near the other passenger, who stood, cigar in mouth, leaning against the rail.

Suddenly this latter spoke.

"Well, Gregory, I see you're after me again," exclaimed a sharp voice.

Chris started. Morgan gripped his arm so that he almost screamed aloud with pain and fright. But Morgan craned his neck to see what manner of man this was who had spoken to his prisoner.

Lynn Shepard stood facing them, and the glow from his cigar as he puffed upon it, lighted up his countenance with an intermittent flash. Chris was stammering something which might have been an introduction of his companion.

But his voice was choked back in his throat and he stood astounded when Morgan dropped his arm and sprang directly before Shepard. He thrust his black face down into Lynn's own, and a terrible oath ripped from between his set teeth.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Lynn, startled, throwing himself back against the rail.

"By Heaven, is it *you?*" growled the man.

His hand shot out and he seized Lynn by the throat.

Then was the time for any courage which may have been hidden in Chris Gregory's make-up to come to the surface. He should have thrown himself upon the back of his master and between them the enraged Morgan would have been overpowered.

But he did not. He could not. He was motionless, watching the encounter like a frozen man.

"Black Morgan!" he heard Lynn cry chokingly.

They strained together, crushed against the rail of the steamer. Chris could hear them panting and the guttural growling of Morgan like the challenge of a bulldog that has its teeth gripped in its enemy's throat.

But Lynn fought desperately, too. Once he heaved his antagonist up, and the rail cracked again as their two bodies fell upon it.

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Then they went over!

Chris, at length stung to action, sprang to the rail. He beheld the two men, locked in each other's arms, whirling over and over as they fell. The sea opened and closed above them, and the ship rushed on into the night.

An awful shriek burst from his throat at that. There was a hasty step along the deck, and one of the petty officers reached his side.

He bore a life-buoy, which he flung far out from the Culloden's side, and his voice rang out like the scream of a night bird:

"Man overboard! Man overboard!"

The cry was repeated to the wheelhouse. Bells jangled all over the ship. The captain himself came hurriedly up from below.

The Culloden described a wide circle, as she was going at such a pace that to stop her dead could not have been accomplished within a mile.

The powerful searchlight was turned on and the sea swept from side to side as the craft plowed back toward the point where the two men had fallen overboard.

But the sea was empty. There was not a sign of the missing ones.

It was useless to put out a boat. The searchlight revealed all the emptiness of the heaving ocean.

"No hope for them," declared the old captain. "They went down like lead—fighting, of course, to the last."

He had heard Gregory's disconnected story. The latter did not know why Lynn and Morgan were enemies, but he had told his own experience with the murderer of Jackson Hawley faithfully.

When the story was related again to the Halifax authorities they did not consider it necessary to hold the American, or to send him back to England. He carried proof as to his identity, so they let him go on to the States.

And he came to me a broken, trembling, nerve-racked man, and told me all.

Lynn was dead. The last hope of saving his own and his sister's rights in the title of the Fool's Pocket mine was gone.

But how could I tell Lillian? No burden more terrible ever fell to the lot of man. I felt my age and bowed beneath it and this new responsibility.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE FACE OF DEATH.

To the finite mind knowledge of the mysteries and wonders of this universe seems to be most unevenly divided.

One man works all his life along a certain groove, like a horse in a treadwheel, and no matter how wide his horizon may seem to him, it is of necessity contracted. While another stands upon the high places of the earth and sees afar—sometimes half blinded by the glories which are spread within his view!

Experienced as I am, and with a wake of years longer than I care to look back upon, Lynn Shepard's life had been broader than mine. When the news of his loss from the Culloden was brought me I believed it without question.

But I doubt that, after young Shepard's experiences of the last few months, he would have so easily given up hope had we exchanged places. He had seen how the chances of God favor the brave man. Doubtless he did not wholly give up when he felt himself falling from the steamship's rail.

There was too much for him to live for to make him easily despair. He had been thrilled by the thought, while the Culloden was plowing her way so bravely across the Atlantic, that perhaps he should meet Bertha Hawley again in Halifax.

He was going there. She was sailing for that port in the Susannah. A meeting would not be strange.

And then he still hoped to learn the whereabouts of Preston Shaw. If he could once find this mysteriously missing old man he hoped to be able to convince him that he meant him no harm, but wished only to gain his own rights in the Fool's Pocket.

These dreams were roughly jarred out of his thought, however, when Black Morgan sprang upon him. He had had curiosity enough to ask the purser about Chris and his strange companion; but not for an instant did he suspect the stranger's identity.

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And for those first few moments, as they struggled back and forth along the deck, he thought only of freeing himself from the clutches of one who seemed to possess the strength of a madman.

Then came that awful fall into the sea. They plunged deep beneath the surface, and fortunate it was so, for they might have come in contact with the whirling blades of the propeller. Many an unfortunate castaway from a steamer has met just this fate.

When Lynn struggled to the surface and shook the water from his eyes, a spark far away on the horizon told him where the vessel had gone.

Then something bobbed up beside him. Black Morgan came to the top, puffing and blowing. Not knowing what the temper of the fellow might be, even after this ducking, Lynn kept away from him.

The murderer raised himself half out of the sea, as though to look about him. His eye rested an instant on Lynn; but he gave him no attention.

"Perdition!" he roared at last. "These soulless devils have left us here."

It did not sound like a cry for help; more like the statement of a surprising fact. He dropped back into the sea, and Lynn could see him paddling easily to keep his head up.

The American was putting forth just enough exertion himself to hinder his sinking.

"It may not be so bad as it looks," he called out. "They'll put out a boat."

Morgan did not notice him. Suddenly Lynn saw an object floating near him. It was white and was visible a long way through the night. He struck out more vigorously for it.

The life-buoy which the petty officer had flung overboard was soon under his hand.

It was a ring of white canvas filled with cork. A man might get this over his head and lean his arms on it, and be comparatively safe for hours in a sea as smooth as this.

And it might help two men to keep above the surface with care.

"Come here!" Lynn shouted. "See what they flung over to us."

There was a splash by his side. Morgan came to the surface after a long slant under water and seized the buoy roughly.

"Hold on! Not that way!" exclaimed the American. "Don't be a fool. We'll have to rest on it easily or it'll do us no good."

Morgan was puffing for breath, but with both hands he sought to drag the ring away from the other.

"What are you about?" cried Lynn again. "It'll be a rest for two of us if you use it right; but we'll both drown if you don't."

"Hands off!" growled the Englishman. "It's only for one."

"You brute!" exclaimed Lynn, the savage in him fully roused at last. "You'll not take this for yourself so fast."

He clutched at the buoy again and secured a good hold of one of the rope loops with his left hand. Morgan tried to drag it away, but only succeeded in forcing both the ring, himself, and his antagonist under water.

When he got his head above the surface again he spit out with the seawater a volley of imprecations. He let go of the ring with one hand and reached for something inside his clothes.

The next instant he threw himself half out of the water and across the buoy, and made a fierce lunge at Lynn with a long bladed dirk. The latter flung himself backward, letting go his hold on the buoy, but escaping the knife.

The American sank into the sea; but he bobbed up in a moment a little way from the fiend and the life-buoy, quite fresh. And his blood boiled in his veins.

All the primeval savagery in a man comes out at such a time as this. Self-preservation is an uncontrollable law—otherwise man would not be on the earth to-day.

Lynn was not one who ordinarily went armed. But he carried in his trousers pocket a heavy clasp-knife, the blade of which locked with a spring when it was opened—something like a sailor's cutty.

Ere he spied the buoy, he had got out of his coat and vest, and now he

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cut away his trousers and sent the shoes to the bottom after them.

Morgan was swimming away with the life-buoy, but Lynn did not propose that he should escape.

Like the rush of a shark after its victim, the American threw himself forward. Morgan heard him coming. He began to tread water again, and raised himself higher, the dirk between his teeth.

Lynn carried his own open knife in his right hand, and he circled about the canvas ring until, suddenly darting forward, he obtained a grip on the handle again with his left.

"You'll not do that!" he gasped, glaring into Morgan's fiery eyes. "It's equal chance for both of us. The ship may come back——"

"It don't matter whether she comes back or not," mumbled the other, much the stronger of the two at that moment, for Lynn had swum hard to overtake him. "You'll look out for yourself, an' I'll save my own bacon."

"I'll have a share of that buoy," the American declared doggedly.

Quick as a flash Black Morgan seized his dirk again and struck at him. But Lynn was ready to catch the blow on his own blade.

The blows they delivered were weak enough at best, for the sea gave no steadiness to their motions, and the heaving waves washed them hither and thither. Nevertheless the duel was quite as deadly as though the actors had been upon solid earth.

Both treading water, one on each side of the buoy, they lunged at each other with all the savageness of wild beasts. Morgan laid Lynn's cheek open; the latter slit down his antagonist's right sleeve, and a long streak of crimson followed the blade.

Black Morgan roared with wrath and rage. His old wounds troubled him, too, for the plasters had been soaked off his scalp, and Lynn beheld the livid edges of the wound gaping.

Now and again both were overturned by a wave, and driven beneath the surface. But neither let go of the ring of safety.

They were unaware of the vivid flashes of light which the Culloden was sending over the sea. The captain of the steamship had failed to figure his exact speed at the time the two men fell overboard, and he did not steam back far enough to observe them.

Besides, an adverse current was bearing Lynn and Morgan in the opposite direction. They, however, were unaware of anything but the desire of each to worst the other.

For now the American was quite as anxious for the other's death as Morgan was for his. It was really one life or the other. Both could not exist for long.

Suddenly, helped by a roller, Morgan raised himself out of the sea and reached mightily for Lynn's breast. The dirk came slanting downward with great force, and the American threw himself backward to escape it. He advanced his own knife at arm's length, however, and the two blades clashed.

But Morgan could not recover himself, and continued to fall across the buoy. His breast came in contact with the point of Lynn's knife. The weight of his body, driven by the sea itself, bore down upon the weapon.

There was a scream of agony forced from the lips of the man. The sea rolled him back again and tore the blade from his body. The crimson flood spurted from the wound.

He rose almost waist high out of the water, lost his hold upon the life-buoy, and fell backward with a splash. Then he went down—down into the depths—and Lynn Shepard was alone!

(To be continued.)

A GENEROUS MAN.

If he had but fifteen cents,
This paragon of men,
He'd buy a sandwich with the five,
And give the waiter ten.

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THAT BLUE PLATE.

BY UNA HUDSON.

The harrowing tale of a disappearing bit of crockery, and of how the remedy came to be worse than the disease.

I SETTLED Nan in her section, and stowed away her traveling impedimenta as best I might in the limited space left for the purpose.

She took her ticket and trunk check when I handed them to her with a word of caution as to their preservation for use in the near future. She had the consciously superior air of a woman entirely fitted to cope with all the difficulties of journeying alone, and launched into voluble directions as to the proper management of the cat and the cook during her absence.

The conductor's warning, "All aboard!" cut short the flood of her eloquence and sent me hurrying from the car.

She thrust her head without the window, and I, as became a dutiful husband, trotted along the platform beside the moving train, endeavoring to catch the final words of wisdom that fell from her lips.

The train gathered speed rapidly, bells rang, whistles tooted, and a trunk laden with trucks rumbled along beside me. Only by the movement of her lips could I tell that Nan was speaking, but I bawled a reassuring, "All right; I understand."

Better, if need be, to juggle a trifle with the truth than that the wife of one's bosom should believe her final injunctions unheard.

And any way, I could make a pretty correct guess as to what Nan was saying. She was probably telling me to guard the blue plate as the very apple of my eye.

Said blue plate, be it understood, was a particularly hideous example of the potter's art, in a somewhat imperfect state of preservation, and our, or rather Nan's, most cherished possession. Her dearest friend had given it to her, and it was reputed to have been brought over in the Mayflower.

It occupied the place of honor in our parlor on a very ornate bracket placed, for the sake of safety, high on the wall. Nan's constant fear was that it would be broken or stolen, and during her infrequent absences from home I watched over that plate as I might a sick child.

That evening I took dinner downtown, and afterwards went to the theater. It was decidedly late when I reached home and I went directly to bed.

But the next morning I bethought me of the blue plate, and dutifully went in to inspect it before leaving for my office.

I glanced carelessly at the shelf where it was wont to stand; then I started with eyes opened wide in unspeakable dismay.

The blue plate was gone!

Of that there could be not the slightest doubt. The shelf was absolutely bare.

I dropped down on hands and knees and began a wild search under tables and behind sofas and chairs. But no plate did I find.

Then I summoned cook.

"Och, murther!" said she, staring in her turn at the place where the plate should have been but was not, "a thafe must have come an' took it in the night while we was asleep in our beds. Sure, an' I wonder what the mistress'll be afther sayin'," and I privately resolved finds it gone."

I thought I could imagine pretty much what "the mistress would be afther sayin'," and I privately resolved that if the best detective in town, and a reward out of all proportion to the value of the stolen object, could procure its return she shouldn't have a chance to say it.

I was an hour late at my office, but as I had reported the theft at police headquarters, engaged two detectives, and

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inserted offers of reward for the return of the plate in all the papers, I did not feel that the time had been altogether misspent.

In the afternoon Nan's brother Ted happened in, and to him I confided my trouble.

"Whe-e-w!" he said, with a long whistle of surprise and incredulity. "Some poor cuss was mighty hard up for something to steal; must have been a china crank. But Nan's household god! Hard lines, old man; you have my sympathy."

"Thanks," I rejoined, "but I'd rather have Nan's plate."

That night at the club I repeated the story of my loss to a roomful of sympathetic listeners.

"Don't take it so to heart, old man," said Irvington, who, if he can't find the silver lining to all his clouds, manufactures one to order; "when the first shock has worn off, you'll be better off without it. My wife had a pitcher, regular monstrosity, one hundred years old and absolutely priceless. Well, one day the cat jumped on the mantel and knocked down the pitcher; broke it all to smash. Wife cried her eyes out for a day or two, but now she's a lot happier than ever she was when she had that blame thing to dust and fuss over."

I knew Irvington meant well, but for my part I refuse to hunt for the bright side of an unfortunate situation with a microscope, and I wasn't much comforted.

At the end of a week my detectives had failed to bring to light the blue plate, but they had unearthed a gang of counterfeiters and a nest of burglars, and had arrested on suspicion a varied assortment of shop-lifters, sneak-thieves, and other petty criminals.

But I had not set out to pose as a public benefactor, and would have greatly preferred the return of the blue plate to the thanks of a grateful community.

At the end of two weeks I fell into a positive panic. I could neither sleep nor eat; I could do nothing but think of the missing plate. My friends said I was getting thin, and my mirror told me I was growing haggard.

Altogether I was most unhappy, my feelings being, I should imagine, very similar to those of a condemned criminal who sees the days slipping by without bringing the pardon he had hoped for.

The day before the time set for Nan's return, Jack Halliday came into my office with a beaming face and an air of great mystery.

"Old chap," said he in a stage whisper, "I've come to save you."

"Humph!" I said shortly. "I don't exactly see how you can unless you've got my blue plate up your sleeve."

"You've hit it," said Jack Halliday, "first crack out of the box. I've got, not one plate, but dozens of 'em. Pay your money and take your choice, and be made happy again."

I looked at him wonderingly and pityingly. We never had been particularly close friends, and it seemed odd that my misfortune should have so preyed upon him as to unsettle his reason.

"I'm not luny," he said, probably reading my thoughts, "but I've discovered a fellow who manufactures crockery and furniture and stuff that the Pilgrim fathers brought over with them. Great scheme, too. He's positively coining money."

I didn't believe that Nan could be taken in by any imitation, however good, of her blue plate, but I was too desperate to let slip any chance, and I went with Jack to interview his maker of antiques.

It was a queer hole he took me to, entered through a furniture repairer's shop, and crowded with all manner of Colonial furniture and with shelves of dishes ranged along the walls.

I verily believe that place contained more household stuff than all the early settlers of this country put together ever laid eyes on.

Jack explained the object of our visit to the proprietor, whom he seemed to know, and pointed to a shelf of blue plates.

Seen from a distance the plates certainly looked very like ours, and when one was put in my hands for a close inspection I could have shouted aloud for very joy. So far as I could see, it was a most faithful imitation of Nan's missing treasure, and there certainly

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was a chance that she might be made to believe it the genuine Mayflower plate.

I promised faithfully to maintain the most inviolate secrecy as to the nature of the place, there was a transfer of coin of the republic, and the plate was mine.

As can well be imagined, I lost no time in getting home and placing my spurious household god on the altar of the late departed. I looked at it from all points of view, and decided, with a sigh of vast relief, that unless Nan should take it down for a close inspection she would never know the difference; and she might not even then.

Doubtless there were points of dissimilarity between the original plate and the substitute, but I believed they could be detected only by careful comparison of the two.

Then I brought cook in and promised to die and haunt her if she so much as said "plate" to her mistress.

Cook, despite her menial position, is a lady of sense and discretion, and, in any event, would, I believe, have refrained from making embarrassing disclosures; however, it seemed as well, and better, to make quite sure.

That night I slept the sweet, dreamless sleep of the conscience-clear, and awoke the next morning to pleased anticipation of my wife's return.

I was on hand when the train pulled in, and took prompt possession of Nan and her various belongings. She cheerfully surrendered everything to my care save a brown bag that she insisted upon carrying herself.

"You see," she explained quite calmly, "it's the blue plate, and I'm afraid you might break it."

The blue plate!

Surely it couldn't be that I had heard aright. I stared at Nan and stuttered unintelligibly.

"What's the matter with you, Dick?" she demanded impatiently. "One would think you didn't know I had taken it with me. You must have known, for I called to you the very last thing after the train had started, and you yelled, 'All right; I understand.' You remember, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I remember," I said weakly.

"You see," explained Nan, "Amy has a miserable little cream jug that she is forever talking about, and I was bound to show her my plate, and it's *much* handsomer than her cream jug, and, any way, I don't believe the cream jug is genuine."

I made some reply, but whether an appropriate one or not I haven't the faintest idea, for all my mental powers were concentrated in an effort to evolve some scheme whereby I might remove my recently purchased plate before Nan should see it.

She would, I well knew, never forgive me for the deception I had thought to practise upon her.

I have no recollection of how we got home. I suppose we took a car in the accustomed way, but if put upon the witness stand I wouldn't dare to swear to it.

I know Nan talked light-heartedly, telling me of her visit, and I said things at intervals, but my mind was nothing save a jumble of blue plates.

I do, however, remember distinctly that when we reached home we found a messenger boy camped on our front door-step. He had a package addressed to me, and I, blissfully ignorant of the nature of its contents, took it, and we went inside.

"It's Ted's writing," said Nan. "What on earth can it be? Do open it, Dick, and see."

I opened it and found—a blue plate and a note.

This is what Nan, who does not believe in a man having secrets from his wife, read over my shoulder:

> It's dollars to doughnuts that Nan won't know the enclosed from her own beloved plate. What are you going to give me for helping you out of your scrape? TED.

"What *does* he mean?" Nan demanded. "Has he gone crazy? And why is he sending you a plate? It looks very much like mine."

"Yes—no—I don't know," I said idiotically, unable to formulate a plausible lie at such short notice. "Nan, don't you—er—want to go up to your room and—er—wash your hands or—or—comb your hair, or *something?*"

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"I do not," said Nan very decidedly. "I want to know the meaning of Ted's ridiculous note, and I want to put my plate on its shelf."

She turned toward the parlor, but I barred the way.

"Nan," I begged, "don't go in there just yet. There—there might be a burglar in there, you know."

"Dick Ellerton," said Nan, "have you been drinking? The idea of a burglar in one's parlor at three in the afternoon!"

"It is rather absurd, isn't it?" I agreed. "It's—it's a right good joke. Ha! Ha!"

I laughed weakly, hoping Nan would join in my merriment. But Nan was not in a laughing mood.

"I don't see the joke," said she.

"It's not a joke," I said, rallying my scattered wits for one final convincing lie. "It's a blue plate. You see, there's one in there on the shelf. I was—was lonely without ours, and I found one down-town something like it and brought it home for—for company, you know. I intended to take it down this morning, but forgot it. Of course it's just a wretched imitation, and I didn't want you to see it."

"Oh, I see," said Nan. "And, of course, that's why Ted sent you one. But he's very much mistaken if he thinks I wouldn't know my own from a clumsy imitation. It was nice of him, though. I'd no idea he was so thoughtful. You poor dear! I didn't know you thought so much of the plate or, of course, I wouldn't have taken it away. We'll go right in and put it in its place. And I don't mind," she ended magnanimously, "your having the other."

I waited a moment, wondering that the fate of Ananias did not overtake me. Then as I heard no feet on the stairs, and seemed to be enjoying my usual good health, I followed Nan into the parlor.

Once inside the door my overstrained nerves gave way entirely, and I sat down on the nearest chair with a sickening, dull thud. For piled on the sofa was a stack of bundles, each addressed in a different handwriting, but all more or less familiar, and instinctively I knew what the brown wrappers concealed.

"It looks," said Nan judicially, "like Christmas or a donation party."

And she began to untie strings and slip off papers.

The plates she placed one by one on the table; the notes she read. I was not called upon to explain; that was quite unnecessary; the notes did that fully and freely.

I sat and watched Nan and the ever increasing pile of plates in fascinated silence. So many evidences of my friends' solicitude for my comfort and happiness would, I reflected, have been most gratifying, but for the trifling fact that throughout it all I traced the machinations of Jack Halliday, who is a notorious practical joker.

Nan went into the hall and came back bringing Ted's plate. Then she took down mine from the shelf, and the collection on the table was complete.

"There are," said she, in an awful voice, "exactly sixteen of them."

Then she picked up her brown bag and carefully unpacked the only and original blue plate. For a moment she studied it intently. Then she took one from the table and carefully compared the two.

She took another from the table. After a time she returned *three* plates to the pile of those contributed by our thoughtful friends.

"I was mistaken," said she in the voice of one from whom all joy has fled. "There are seventeen."

Then she fell upon my neck and wept the bitter tears of disillusion.

It was even so. Line for line, crack for crack, nick for nick, Nan's plate and the other sixteen were identical.

The next morning the ash-man hauled away from our premises the remains of seventeen blue plates.

Eventually Irvington's prophecy was fulfilled, and the white dove of peace came back and once more spread her wings over our distracted household, for Nan and I, acting upon the advice of a certain eminent authority on interior decoration, banished from our home everything we did not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful. The blue plate, in parenthesis, had been neither.

But Colonial china as a subject of conversation is tabooed in our family.

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A DESPERATE DEAL.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

The astonishing device employed by a father in order to compass a certain marriage for his son.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

SIR PETER ARNOLD and Mr. Loftus Bond, bankers of London, are trustees for the estate of the late M. Henri Rougière, a Belgian, long resident in England. By his will he provides that his fortune, a vast sum, shall go to his only daughter, Marie, on her marriage, provided she does not marry her cousin, M. Alfred Rougière. His brother, Alfred's father, comes over from Belgium, determined to get hold of this money for his son. By representing to Marie that the bankers are interested in certain London hospitals, to which the fortune is to go provided she does not comply with the terms of the will, he gains her consent to wed a certain Mr. Bunker Hill.

By scanning the newspapers closely M. Rougière has learned of this Hill as a young man without friends, who has been knocked down in the streets by Lord Shumway's carriage and taken to a hospital to die. By telling the authorities that he is the young man's uncle, the Belgian has him removed to his hotel and made as comfortable as possible, and in due course acquaints him with his scheme for him to marry the niece in order that she may become a rich widow. The will, of course, says nothing about whether she shall marry Alfred Rougière or not, once she has married somebody else. So Marie is brought from her school to the hotel and married to the young man Hill, whom the doctors have declared cannot recover. Then she is taken back to Belgium by the Rougières, who have need of her money to recoup their fallen fortunes.

Alfred contrives to worm himself into the good graces of his cousin, the young widow, and late in June he is giving a farewell bachelor dinner at the château. Meantime Hill, taken away on Lord Shumway's yacht, has not died, and, returning to London, finds out through Messrs. Arnold and Bond the trick that has been played on Marie Rougière. He betakes himself at once to Belgium, arrives in the midst of Alfred's pre-nuptial festivities, and demands to see his wife. Alfred, very much frightened, requests him to call the next day and see his father, bows him out into what he makes the American believe is the *porte-cochère*, but which proves to be a strong room with an iron door, which is at once bolted from without.

Hill contrives to make his escape, but not until the occupants of the château have departed. He discovers, however, entries in his wife's diary that lead him to suppose she was not entirely indifferent to him at the time of their strange marriage, and he is more determined than ever to find her. He obtains track of the party finally in Algiers, whither he betakes himself, and turns up at the governor-general's ball. Marie, dancing with Alfred's friend, Lieutenant Fournier, asks to be introduced to "that splendid American," whom she has failed to recognize. But Alfred knows who it is, and attemps to prevent Fournier arranging for the presentation. But his father, ignorant of the facts, commands him to let the girl alone, and Alfred, helpless in the face of the impending revelation, staggers into another room to brace his nerves with brandy.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INCIDENT AT THE BALL.

M. ROUGIERE, wondering very much what this was all about, sought his son and found him leaning on a table, his face white and drawn, his eyes set and staring, and his general appearance that of a man who had suddenly come up against a terrible disaster.

"For Heaven's sake, Alfred," he said, "what does this mean? Why, at a time like this, when the whole world, one might say, is looking, do you show this emotion? What is there in the appearance of an American officer to cause you this pain? I know you do not like Americans; but at a ball like this, where all nations gather, your actions are at least puzzling."

"Are they?" answered Alfred, with a grim smile. "Well, do you know who that officer is?"

"I do not. I have not the pleasure of knowing a single officer of that army."

"Well, that's Hill."

"Hill? I am still unwise. What Hill?"

"Bunker Hill, the man you married Marie to in London."

**This story began in the April issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of* 30 *cents.*

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"Good Heaven! But I thought he was dead."

"As you see, he is very much alive."

M. Rougière's face grew ashen.

"What is this you tell me? That man who was declared by the best surgeons of London to be incurable—to die within two days—you say this is the man?"

"That is the man."

M. Rougière sank down beside Alfred and called for an attendant to bring him brandy. The servant obeyed, and M. Rougière swallowed the cognac at a gulp.

"But I do not yet understand," he said. "You never saw the man. How do you know him? I am sure you are mistaken."

Alfred laughed harshly.

"You will find out how mistaken I am. I tell you he is Bunker Hill."

"But, in Heaven's name, how can he be? He was dying. We had the satisfaction of hearing all the surgeons say that."

"Well, surgeons make mistakes at times. These were no different from others. That English lord whose wife he saved took him on his yacht with his own family physician, and he got well."

"But—but—how do you know this?"

The perspiration came out on Alfred's face. Should he make a confidant of his father? What else, he thought, could he do under the circumstances? But not yet—not until the thing was inevitable.

"I am sure I am right," he said. "If it is not too late, prevent the meeting, and give me a chance to think."

M. Rougière rose and stood looking down at his son.

"Alfred, there is something you have not told me."

"Yes, but not now—not now. Do as I say. Prevent Fournier introducing Marie to—her husband."

"My Heavens, yes!" exclaimed M. Rougière, and he started for the ballroom.

The crush around the governor and the American was so great that Fournier had not yet succeeded in getting near enough with Marie for the introduction. Right behind them, unmindful of the fact that he and Fournier were not friends, was the Sultan of Fezzan.

M. Rougière fought his way to Marie's side.

"My dear child, I have something to say to you. And to you, lieutenant."

"Very well," said Fournier. "Let us withdraw from the crowd. There will be ample time to meet that big American."

They turned aside, and M. Rougière led them to a place where they would not be overheard.

"It may seem strange to you, my dear lieutenant," he said, "and to you, Marie, that I do not wish you to speak to that American. But this is true. I have an idea that he is a person well known as very wicked. Even to dance with him would be to ruin your reputation in the estimation of all the people here. You see by his carriage, his manner, that he is a man of the world. I ask that you do not speak to him."

Fournier rubbed his mustache and thought some things.

"Devilish strange," he said to himself. "M. Rougière objects to her meeting a man of the world, and what in Heaven's name is Alfred? What else am I? Oh, there is something behind all this."

"Well, uncle, if you so desire, of course I will not. But I would really be pleased to talk to him, for you remember my husband was an American."

M. Rougière nodded.

"But leave it to me," he said.

"I begin to smell a rat," thought Fournier. "There is some mystery in this widow business. My pretty friend perhaps has had her affair. Well, what is it to me? I have not the American as a rival for her favors to-night. That is something."

A waltz was beginning, and the lieutenant claimed it as one of the two that had been promised. They entered the dance together, and the eyes of everybody followed them.

"I pity that girl if she falls in love with Fournier," said an officer of the garrison to Hill. "Fournier is a regular heart-breaker."

"Who is she?" asked Hill, and then, as his eyes followed the graceful figure they began to dilate.

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"She is introduced by Fournier as Madame Hill," was the answer.

Hill grew white. He then looked for M. Rougière, and soon found him.

"I am pleased to meet you again, M. Rougière," he said. "As you see, I did not die. I am very well, and have come to this ball for no other purpose than to regain my wife."

M. Rougière stared and grew whiter than Hill.

"Your wife? Impossible. You know—it was not—a real marriage."

"The devil it wasn't. I think it was. I shall speak to her at once."

"Oh, do not! It is not the place. You should have come to the château in Bruges."

"Confound the château! I went there, and that precious son of yours shut me in a dungeon and left me to starve. But I got out, and now I'll have my wife or the lives of you and your son."

M. Rougière breathed hard. This was no dying man he had to deal with now.

This man, with his massive shoulders, his giant arms, and the heavy cavalry saber that hung gracefully at his side, made M. Rougière look weak and uncertain. What could he do?

"I have that little matter to settle with your son," he went on. "But that will keep. I know the entire proceeding. You lied to me and you lied to her. You wanted to get the fortune in your own clutches. There was no danger. The English bankers were honorable men. I cannot say as much for you."

"Have a care!" said M. Rougière.

Hill laughed.

"I'll have a care. A care that you don't monkey with me any more."

"I did not know you were an officer," remarked M. Rougière.

"It is not your business. The thing is that I am legally Marie Rougière's husband. I propose to say so to her, and then whatever she wishes will be done. I am not a fortune hunter. I am rich enough myself. But I do not propose to have that young girl placed in your clutches without letting her know the truth."

"My Heaven! My son is in here. Come—let us speak to him."

"If he speaks any other way than as a gentleman I'll bang his head," said Hill.

Alfred Rougière shuddered when he saw the giant enter with his father.

"Well, you miserable scoundrel, I didn't starve," said Hill. "As you will perceive, if you use your eyes, I am here."

"I see," muttered Rougière. "But why?"

"Why? I shall inform Marie that I am her husband."

"Yes, of course, I expected that."

"But you will not do that here, at the ball," interposed M. Rougière.

"Right here, at the ball, and in the presence of the governor."

"No, no, I beseech you! It is so terrible! It will ruin me."

"You didn't care if you ruined Marie."

"Oh, I meant nothing wrong. It was just as I told you."

"You lie. I saw your brother's will."

"I explained to—but have you been told? I have met the gentleman before," growled Alfred.

"Yes," groaned M. Rougière, at his wits' end.

"Oh, you met me before, all right, and you'll meet me again. I saw the will, and know your game."

"I told M. Hill," said Alfred, speaking to his father, "that it was not a *bona fide* marriage. Simply a ruse to obtain the money from the Englishmen."

"Yes, yes," said M. Rougière, biting at the bait. "It was not a real wedding at all. You are not her husband. Nothing was ever recorded."

"No?" said Hill with a satirical smile. "Look at this."

He took a leather wallet from his pocket, and from this a paper.

"Here is a copy of the register furnished me by the clerk of the parish. A wedding registered in England is inviolable the world over. Gentlemen, if you value your lives, keep your hands off. I shall now go and see my wife."

At that moment Fournier entered. He saw there was trouble. M. Rougière started to follow Hill out. Hill brushed against Fournier, not noticing him in his haste.

Alfred Rougière seized Fournier.

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"My friend, stand by me now!" he whispered. "That man—you must challenge and kill him! It must be done—to-night!"

"Eh? An American officer? But why? He has done me no harm."

"I tell you yes. I am no duelist. You are. I must tell you! That is the husband of my cousin."

"Perdition!" exclaimed Lieutenant Fournier, and then he drew a long breath.

"I am simply ruined if you do not kill him. He rubbed against you, and that gives a French officer an excuse. Will you do it?"

"I am not afraid," said Fournier. "But—well, what if I do not?"

"Then the monster will kill my father and myself."

"In that case, friendship counts. *Monsieur l'Americain*, I salute you."

"Me?" asked Hill, turning round.

"In entering the room just now you rudely brushed me. That is not the courtesy of Algiers. I insist upon an apology at once."

"I did not even know you were here. I meant no discourtesy, and so if I did such a thing I am willing to apologize."

Fournier was disconcerted. The handsome black face of the Sultan of Fezzan showed just behind Hill.

"You Americans think you can insult people and then get out of it with your cowardly apologies. You always apologize and never fight. That is what I think of you."

He thrust his glove into Hill's face.

The next moment an arm of iron, clad in the sleeve of the United States cavalry, shot out and Lieutenant Fournier went crashing into Alfred Rougière, the two of them tilted against the table, and bottles and glasses went helter-skelter.

"Good!" exclaimed the Sultan of Fezzan. "I like you. I like two people here to-night, you and Madame Hill."

"Madame Hill is my wife, and these devils have conspired to rob her of her fortune."

"You shall hear of this at once—before the night is over, I demand satisfaction!" cried Fournier, now mad enough on his own account to challenge. "My friend, M. Alfred Rougière, will act for me, and Captain Remy of my regiment."

"I'm ready," said Hill.

"Monsieur, permit me," said the black Sultan of Fezzan. "You are perhaps not acquainted here. My card. I am the Sultan of Fezzan. Allow me, in this affair, to offer you my services."

"I accept, with thanks," said Hill, and the black sultan and the tall American shook hands.

The sultan and Hill returned to the ball-room. The beautiful face of Marie was pale with weariness and excitement.

Princes of Africa hung about her. Officers from the garrison and from Gibraltar vied with each other for her dances. She was having a fascinating time, but she wished she was on board her yacht. All the glitter wearied her.

Suddenly the report of a cannon startled everybody.

Then an officer in full uniform rushed into the crowd and without ceremony shouted to the governor;

"Save yourselves! Order all to arms! The Kabyles have risen, and the palace is attacked!"

"Great Heaven!" cried the governor.

"And may the Lord help us now!" added his wife. "We are doomed."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VANISHING MARIE.

THE alarm spread through the great assemblage and the characteristics of the various nations made themselves at once manifest.

The brother of the Sultan of Morocco spoke hastily to several Moorish sheiks, and then vanished from view. It was neither his policy to protect the French, nor at that time to take an active part against them. There were troubles enough in Morocco.

The firing continued outside, and as if by magic French troops swarmed into the Government House.

Every window was filled with soldiers. Cannon were placed in advantageous positions, and while the cries "Down with the Franks!" and "Allah Ill Allah!" resounded from the streets, the governor-general was calm.

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It was he who personally directed every movement. The panic that swept away so many of his guests did not disturb him.

He had his troops, soldiers well tried in the tropical sun and hateful warfare of the Moors and Kabyles, and as their riflery became incessant he smiled as if already victorious.

The Bey of Tunis found a place inside an audience-room, and held his sword and his breath at the same time. He did not know which side to take.

French influence had for some time governed him. Yet he hated the Franks.

There were two men who seemed to feel neither alarm nor fear. They were the governor-general of Algeria and Colonel Hill of the United States Cavalry. A bullet came through an open window and the United States Consul was wounded.

Hill sprang to the side of Marie. M. Rougière, old as he was, had grabbed a sword of the terror-stricken Turk, and was standing as if ready to assist in protecting the seat of French government in Algeria. Alfred, though never accused of cowardice, was not a fighting man, and knew not what to do. He, too, came to Marie.

"Marie," said Mr. Rougière, "there are two of us here who will protect you. Fear nothing."

"Yes, two!" said Alfred.

"There is one," said Hill, as with his unsheathed sword he took his place beside her.

Marie looked at him. This was the handsome officer she had wished to meet, and from whom she had been commanded by her uncle.

"This is my right!" said Alfred.

"To protect my wife?" demanded Hill.

"Your—wife!" cried Marie.

"Yes. Do you not remember me? I was wounded and supposed to be dying. But I am well and am still your husband. I have the copy of the register in my pocket."

"Heavenly God!" cried Marie. "I thought you were dead. I have been a widow six months."

"I know—I understand the whole thing. But listen to me. Come here, in this corner. We can speak a moment without fear. The real fighting has not reached us yet."

He drew her, unresisting, to a corner, and Alfred followed.

"I wish to speak to my wife alone," said Hill.

"She is not your wife."

"You lie! I will prove it to her as I did to you."

"I know his voice!" said Marie, with something of delight in her tones and manner. "I know it is the M. Hill to whom I was married in London."

Smoke began to roll into the Government House, called by many the palace, though the real palace was some distance away.

Alfred drew a pistol from his pocket and aimed at Hill. With a blow he was sent careening against the Sultan of Fezzan, who had kept as near as possible to Hill.

The black prince gave the fellow a kick that sent him in one direction and his pistol in another.

"Listen, my wife," said Hill, speaking as rapidly as he could articulate the words. "I may not live. This fight is to a finish, and if I live through that I have a duel with a French officer. But I wish to tell you just what happened. You are engaged to marry your cousin."

"God forbid—now!" she answered.

"You were taught to think you were a widow. I was chosen as your husband to save your fortune. It seemed a good scheme, and I consented. But I have learned that your fortune was never in any danger. The will of your father gave you the absolute control of your money no matter whom you married, provided you did not marry Alfred Rougière. But it was not stated that as a widow, having already come into possession of your money, you might not then marry him.

"This was the game. Believing me to be dying, they married you to me, and those dolts of Englishmen handed you over the money. Then you were free to marry your cousin if I died. But I did not. I am alive—see?"

"Oh, I am so glad! I was afraid!" gasped the frightened girl.

"I was in the château. I saw your diary. I know you have thought of me.

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And now I will protect you. When this is over you may have your freedom, but while there is danger I shall protect you as my wife."

The smell of smoke now became apparent, and flames were seen shooting up into the darkness of the night.

"Fly!" said the Sultan of Fezzan. "You and your wife may be able to escape."

The doors were burst open and a horde of Kabyles poured in.

"Allah Ill Allah! Mahomet Resoul Ullah!"

The French rifles turned their murderous fire upon the intruders. Men fell as they attacked. Women screamed, for they knew what a Kabyle onslaught meant to them.

A swarm threatened the group in the corner. M. Rougière and Alfred stood there helpless.

"Here!" cried Hill. "I am going into the fight. I charge you with the safety of my wife, and if harm comes to her and not to you I will kill you both."

"I will protect my niece," said M. Rougière with chattering teeth.

The heavy United States cavalry sword leaped from its scabbard again, and the tall form of Hill was seen plunging into the thickest of the fight. Like a demon he plowed his way, and men went down wherever he fought.

His tall and powerful form was a mark for them all, but he seemed to bear a charmed life. Black, brown, and devilish, in they poured. Beside him stood the black Sultan of Fezzan.

"I like you and your madame!" he said. "I'll fight with you to the last."

The two swords worked havoc with the invaders. The rifles from the upper windows mowed down swarms in the streets. But the sheiks who had planned this surprise had planned too well.

In through the various gates poured tribe after tribe, the sheiks having held them back for this vital moment. Trumpets called to arms from every quarter. All Algiers was in a pandemonium.

But in it all the tall form of the American was evident. His sword seemed not to halt for a moment.

At one time Fournier stood by his side. A Moor aimed a spear at him. The sword of the American leaped forward and the spear was not thrown.

"My God!" said Fournier. "And I was to fight that man!"

The Government House was afire. That was clear enough. The governor-general, coming from above, called for volunteers to fight the flames.

"Protect my wife!" said Hill to the Sultan of Fezzan. "I'll help with the fire."

He fought his way through a crowd of Berbers and found a line of French soldiers with buckets.

"Hurry up!" he shouted. "While we wait the building burns."

He directed everything. The governor-general came to give a command and saw the situation.

"He is better than I," he said, and he returned to his riflemen.

The city of Algiers had lost its gala appearance. Women no longer lolled on roofs. Lovers breathed no more sweet words in their ears. It was fighting from one gate to another.

The barracks was on fire, and word came to the governor that men were dying, standing in the flames to fight.

"Tell them to leave the barracks!" he commanded. "Tell them to sweep the streets."

The streets of Algiers were filled with fighting men. Shops were torn down or set on fire. Mobs sacked the churches. Women fled in terror to the mosques or to the Government House.

"This thing is going all wrong," said Hill, and he stopped in the midst of a fighting crowd. "We are not strong enough. We want some real guns."

"Monsieur, we have two rapid fire machines, but the men are killed."

"Huh! Where are they?"

It was Fournier. He led the way and they brought out the guns, assisted by French infantry. The artillery officers and men were now at the gates to prevent a further influx of the tribes.

In the very center of the great ballroom they placed the rapid fire guns, and with the skill acquired in the Spanish war Hill began to operate one and Fournier the other.

Row after row among the invaders went down. Above, the riflery was in-

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cessant, but it seemed to have no effect. But these two guns, working on a swivel and sending their deadly fire into the ranks of the howling Berbers, held them back.

"More!" shouted Hill to Fournier. "More! We'll clear the place in a short time."

The spears and swords of the Berbers could not compete with that deadly fire. With their usual cries of "Allah Ill Allah!" they swept backward through the doors.

The Government House was still on fire, but there were no longer any Kabyles within it.

"Now the flames!" shouted Hill, and, sheathing his sword, he again went to join the fire brigade.

His energy, the resistless impulse he gave the men, saved the building. Two hours they fought, the smoke and flame driving them back from time to time, his encouraging voice shouting always above the din for the men to return.

And return they did. Napoleon never had a braver set of heroes than those men who fought that fire.

At last the fire was under control. The governor-general sought the American.

"My God, what would we have done without you?" he asked.

"Fought as you did—nobly," was the reply. "I must find my wife."

He left the crowd and went back to the smoke filled ball-room. The governor's wife was sitting half unconscious in a chair.

On the floor lay M. Rougière, shot through the head. Alfred was nowhere to be seen, nor Marie.

Hill looked around in bewilderment and alarm. He spied, across the room, the black face of the Sultan of Fezzan.

"My wife is missing, also Alfred Rougière," he said as he crossed to the black prince.

"Dead?" was the question.

"I do not know. I am more alarmed at this than at the attack."

"You were not alarmed at that at all. But this—wait. Let me investigate."

They roamed through the building, now almost deserted, for the soldiers were pursuing the defeated Kabyles to the gates. But no trace of Marie could be found.

"Ha!" cried the sultan, as he brushed aside a large portière in the dim refreshment-room. "A hero indeed."

It was Alfred Rougière he had found, crouching in terror out of sight, afraid of his life.

And he had never been called a coward.

"Where is Marie?" demanded Hill.

"I do not know. I left her with my father, while I joined the fight."

The black sultan laughed.

"But your father is dead, and Marie gone."

"Oh, my God!"

"Come out of there, beast," said the black sultan, and taking Alfred by the hair he dragged him forth.

"Now, M. Rougière, try for once to be a man."

Fournier found them.

"It is all over, and the building is safe, and so is the governor-general," he reported.

"But my wife is gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"Where? I do not know. M. Rougière is dead, and while I was fighting the fire my wife disappeared."

"We must find her," said Alfred. "Let us be men."

"Huh!" observed the Sultan of Fezzan. "It is about time."

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPROMPTU DUEL.

In the general exodus no one paid any attention to any one else. Consequently Fournier, Rougière, Hill, and the Sultan of Fezzan found themselves in a group alone.

"My father is dead," said Rougière. "Nothing now remains but to find Marie."

"Oh!" said the Sultan of Fezzan.

"Why do you exclaim? She is my cousin, and is to be my wife."

"So!" said the black prince. "In my country a man who can afford it has more than one wife. I had not heard that among Christians a woman had two husbands."

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Rougière looked angrily at Hill, then questioningly at Fournier.

"Is that matter ended?" he asked.

"What matter?"

"Was there not a challenge?"

"I think there was," said the black sultan.

"Have we not had enough fighting?" asked Hill. "It seems to me we should join in the search for Marie."

"But you!" said Alfred Rougière hotly. "If we find her you will claim her as your wife."

"Most assuredly," replied Hill.

Fournier looked troubled.

"You see," he said, as if in explanation, "when I challenged monsieur, we were strangers. Since then we have fought side by side. I am not anxious to continue our quarrel."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rougière. "You have seen his sword in action. You do not wish to fight him."

Fournier colored.

"I always thought you were brave," said Alfred. "I, myself, am not afraid."

"Then challenge him."

"But you have already challenged. You must either fight or withdraw, in which case I must look for a second. I would not have a coward."

"Monsieur, you forget yourself!"

But Rougière had the one purpose in mind. He knew Fournier was a practised duelist. If Fournier would fight Hill there was still a chance that Marie would be a widow.

Fournier flushed again at Rougière's words.

"I think you forget what is due under the circumstances," said Fournier. "I challenged at your request, using the fact that M. le Colonel bumped against me. But he is a brave man. Had it not been for him I could not have held the building."

"Oh, you held the building!" said Alfred. "Good! Then the troops had nothing to do with that."

"Yes, but it was M. le Colonel who thought of the rapid fire guns and who assisted in the use of them."

"This is idle talk," said Hill. "I have no quarrel with the lieutenant. If you want to fight me, say so. I'll fight you with or without cause. I've cause enough."

"That seems to be right," said the Sultan of Fezzan. "As I understand the matter, this is a quarrel between you two. Now, if you are not afraid, why not challenge M. l'Americain Colonel to a duel?"

Alfred had no wish to do that. The powerful arm of the American he knew would be too much for him. The cool manner, the sharp eye, were not what he wanted to meet in open combat.

"Gentlemen," said the voice of the governor-general, who approached slowly, "we have had enough fighting. Do I hear something of a duel? What is it about?"

"Nothing much," said Fournier. "I did challenge M. le Colonel, but he and I fought side by side, and now—well——"

"He is afraid," said Rougière.

"But whose fight is it? Let me know? This is a strange matter."

"Your excellency," said the Sultan of Fezzan, "permit me to tell what I know. It appears that the American colonel is the husband of the beautiful lady, Mme. Hill, who was the light of the ball until the attack took place. M. Rougière was her cousin, and, under the impression that she was a widow, he wished to marry her."

"But he knew she was not a widow," said Hill. "I might explain more."

He told the entire story and exhibited his copy of the English register.

"And where is madame?" asked the governor.

"She is missing. Instead of fighting here, I think we ought to make a search for her," said Hill.

"Well, I am much of that opinion myself. Let me think! You say she is missing?"

"Yes. M. Rougière, her uncle, was killed, and she disappeared while we were fighting."

"And you stand here quarreling? Nonsense! Fight afterwards. Find madame now."

"But the thing is, where did she go? Has she been taken care of by the ladies of the garrison?"

"I think not. I have made inquiries and have heard nothing of such action."

"Then what could have happened?"

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"That is what we must learn. Who knows anything?"

"I might be permitted to hazard a guess," said the sultan.

"What is that?"

"The sheik Ibrahim seemed smitten with the lady. Every one knows what the sheik is. I suggest that we find the sheik."

"Ibrahim? He sympathizes with the rebels," said the governor. "He left early, I am sure."

"Then he has had a start. Messieurs, I know where to find the sheik. May I offer my services?"

"I accept," said Hill.

"But I protest against your going at all," interposed Alfred.

"On what ground?"

"Because I do. The death of her uncle leaves me my cousin's natural protector. You are a——"

Before he finished, a blow from Hill stretched him on the floor.

"No, I cannot permit that! He is my friend!" exclaimed Fournier. "As an American—a brave man—I admire you—but this mean action——"

"What is mean? If you had been shut in a dungeon to starve to death, you would strike the man who did it?"

"But Rougière is not capable of such an action."

"He is, and was. Now either fight me or drop all quarreling. I want to get the thing over with and find my wife."

"His wife!" sneered Alfred.

"Yes, my wife."

The Sultan of Fezzan did not seem to be pleased at the way things were going.

"Look here," he said. "Insults have been passed and a challenge given. Either fight or separate."

"I admit that separation would please me," said Hill. "Still, I am willing to fight."

"Then fight!" growled Rougière, and he drew a pistol.

Before he had time to use it, Hill knocked him down again.

"Assassination is not a duel," said the governor. "I declare, I do not know what to do. There are——"

"Your excellency, you are needed at once! Madame le General wishes——"

The governor did not wait to hear what his wife wanted. He dashed away.

The black sultan, with a gleam in his eyes that spoke of pleasure, shut the door.

"We are four," he said. "There is no necessity of counting words. I have offered my services to the American. I like him and I like his wife. Now, then, it is two against two. There is a sword dropped by a brave French officer in his flight! Pick it up, you M. Rougière, and let us get at it."

As he spoke he leaned forward and slapped Alfred's face.

"This does mean fight!" said Fournier. "I stand by my friend."

The thing took place so quickly that Hill could not interfere. He found himself face to face with Fournier, with a drawn sword.

Rougière met the black sultan squarely.

It was a double duel without seconds, without surgeons, without mercy. The pent up hate in Rougière's heart leaped forth as he met the black sultan's attack. Fournier, knowing the strength of the American's arm, was cautious.

The heavy American cavalry saber clanged against that of Lieutenant Fournier, while the sword of the black sultan played music on that of Rougière.

It was Rougière who fell first. The American at once sheathed his weapon.

"I have no quarrel with you, but could kill you in a moment if I wished," he said. "Rougière is down. Does that satisfy you?"

"I should say yes," said Fournier. "I am bleeding from a dozen places. Permit me to compliment you upon your sword play. Are you in the regular army?"

"Yes," replied Hill. "In the Spanish-American war I volunteered in the regiment known as the Rough Riders. I was then transferred to the command of a volunteer regiment and afterwards appointed by President Roosevelt a colonel in the regular army."

"You are a soldier and a gentleman. Come, let us find Mme. Hill."

They turned to leave as the black sultan opened the door, and suddenly a pistol shot rang out.

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A bullet plowed through the left shoulder of the American, while a demoniac smile played on Rougière's face. A smoking revolver was in his hand.

"Oh," cried Fournier, "that is not right! I will not permit that! Are you wounded much, monsieur?"

A peculiar look came into Hill's face. His left arm hung useless by his side. But he stepped up to Rougière, who was not really wounded, and took him in his strong right hand.

"I am still so far from dead," he said, and, raising the Belgian coward with his right hand, he dashed him against the wall.

The fellow fell unconscious to the floor and lay in a heap.

"The next time," said the American, "I shall certainly kill him."

"And I," added the black sultan to himself, "will see to it that there is a next time. I have heard of Americans. If they are all like this, let Europe tremble. Now I understand things better than before. In France an officer is a gentleman, and a peasant may be a man. But this American officer is a man and a gentleman at the same time. I think I see trouble for the sheik Ibrahim. Heavens, what strength!"

And leaving Rougière on the floor, the other three passed out.

(To be continued.)

WHEN THE TIGER SPRANG.

BY CHARLES CAREY.

The man with the new job, and the night visitor that deprived him of it.

IT was at Coney Island, and Crandall was vainly endeavoring to compose himself to sleep.

Without roared and rumbled the unceasing din—the nerve-racking grind of the organs at the merry-go-rounds, the crashing discord of many bands, the strident calls of the venders along the street, the shrill squeal of impudent steam whistles, the combined babble of the hurrying crowds—the whole rising into a diapason of tumult which drowned even the majestic surge of the ocean, pounding away upon the sands not a hundred yards distant.

The ordinary noises of Coney Island are capable of murdering sleep as efficaciously as *Macbeth* ever did; but Crandall's brain had to contend not only against them, but also against the distracting tumult of a menagerie, next door to the hotel where he was restlessly tossing upon his pillow.

No sooner would he attune his ear to the general chorus, and fancy that he might thereby lull himself to sleep, than there would burst upon his consciousness some new uproar from this establishment—the deep bellow of a lion, the spiteful snarl of a tiger, the squeal of a monkey, or the croaking chatter of talking birds.

So Crandall turned and tossed in staring wakefulness upon his narrow bed, and profanely reviled every foot of Coney Island from the Concourse to Sea Gate.

Yet the place was Hobson's choice with him. He had absolutely reached the end of his tether.

He had come to New York about a year before, with a stout heart and glowing hopes, intending to make his mark in journalism.

But, somehow or other, he had failed to catch on. Editors, when importuned for a job, coldly informed him that they had no vacancies; the stories which he submitted were invariably returned.

Meanwhile, the little store of cash he had brought with him steadily dwindled. His prospects appeared no better. In short, he realized that unless something speedily turned up there was nothing but starvation ahead.

Then a brilliant inspiration came to him. It was the height of the summer, and in that dull season there was little chance of his securing anything in town.

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Why not go to Coney Island and obtain a position as press agent for one of the numerous exhibitions down there? It would not only give him employment; it would take him away from the hot, ill-smelling city, give his lungs a chance to breathe the revivifying ozone of the sea.

But again his ill-luck followed him. Day after day he journeyed to the Island, importuning managers to give him an opportunity, enticingly setting forth his qualifications; but always he received the old answer. There were no vacancies.

At last, in sheer desperation, his last penny gone, he heard of a situation which he could get as cashier in a restaurant at one of the hotels on Surf Avenue, and gladly he seized upon it.

The hours were long, the pay was meager; but the position included board and lodging, and Crandall, optimistic even in his misery, congratulated himself that it was a daylight job.

"At any rate, I shall get in seven good hours of sleep every night," he said to himself.

The futility of any such hope he quickly discovered on this, the first twenty-four hours of his sojourn.

How long he fought to render his senses unconscious to the combined tumult without, he never knew; but, strange as it may seem, tired nature did at last assert herself, and he dropped off into an uneasy slumber.

When he awoke it was with a quick and sudden start. He thought at first it was the booming roar of a lion from the menagerie next door, which still vibrated upon the air, that had aroused him; but a moment later there came to him a vivid realization of the fact that there was something moving within his own room.

The shade to the window he had drawn to exclude the glare of electricity which made the outside world almost as bright as midday. Now this moved slightly with a passing breeze, and in the faint, momentary illumination Crandall caught one glimpse of a huge, hairy creature pacing up and down his chamber.

Just one glimpse! But that was enough to congeal the very blood in his veins, and to paralyze all his faculties with terror.

He shrank back shuddering to the furthermost corner of the bed and drew the covers close about him, as though they could afford him protection.

In the first flash of his intelligence, he had recognized the identity of his visitant. That striped, tawny coat could belong to but one beast that walks upon four legs.

It was simply that one of the fierce, untamed tigers in the menagerie had escaped from its cage and had sought a refuge in his apartment.

A cold sweat burst out upon Crandall; the hair seemed to be rising on his head; his throat was constricted with horror. He lay perfectly still, scarcely daring even to breathe, lest he should attract the attention of the brute.

All his powers seemed to be concentrated into listening and watching, intensely nerving himself to meet the onslaught when it should come.

So alert indeed had grown his hearing that he could distinctly catch the soft pad-pad of the tiger's feet as it prowled about the room, could hear it as it brushed against the various articles of furniture, could note its sniffing at the water pitcher where that vessel stood upon the floor, and then stopping to lap at the contents with its tongue.

His pupils, straining through the darkness, beheld now here, now there, the greenish phosphorescent gleam of the beast's unwinking eyes, and ever and anon, when they approached close to his bed, his heart would stop in a spasm of fear, as he thought that the attack must now surely come.

Meanwhile, for all his terror, his mind was vividly alert. Plan after plan presented itself to him to escape from the situation; but each in turn was as rapidly discarded.

He knew that the slightest movement, the least unusual noise, would bring his enemy springing down upon him. His only avenue of safety was to lie perfectly still, and to pray that the tiger might eventually see fit to depart the way he came.

The bed was a long distance away from the door. To attempt to reach it,

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or to call for help, must only precipitate the impending catastrophe.

He faintly hoped that the tiger, after the manner of its kind, and finding its new quarters to its liking, might curl up upon the floor and go to sleep.

But the beast, so far as he could judge, had every opposite intention. The place was evidently strange to him, and he proposed to explore it.

Around and around the room he prowled, restlessly, uneasily, sniffing into corners, his lambent eyes showing through the darkness, whenever he turned them in Crandall's direction, like emeralds upon a band of velvet.

Around and around the room he went, closer and closer came he each time to the bed, until finally he stopped, and Crandall knew from the steady glare of the wicked eyes that he himself was being inspected.

It must come now; in another moment the battle would be on! He had not a weapon of any kind at hand, not even a pocket-knife. With his bare hands must he fight this beast of teeth and claws!

And then the very desperation of his case brought him an inspiration. He did have a weapon, the one weapon which alone carries fear to the hearts of the denizens of forest and jungle!

Very cautiously he reached his hand out from underneath the covers and sought the pocket of his vest, where it hung across his chair at his bedside.

Thank Heaven! He had not been mistaken. His match-box, filled with lucifers, was there. Now he was armed, ready for the contest, whenever his foe should see fit to challenge.

He had not long to wait. A second later his intent gaze saw the green eyes grow fiercer and more malignant. There was a quick spring, an instant of transition, and then he felt the landing of the great body on the foot of his bed.

Crandall hesitated no longer. Scratching all the matches in his box at one fell swoop, he thrust them into the bedclothes and hurled the blazing mass full at the crouching tiger.

At the same instant he leaped from the bed, made the door, burst it open, and tore, shrieking for help, down the corridor.

The house was in a commotion. Guests, waiters, and employees of the hotel crowded the hallway and scattered out of the place in a panic when they learned the cause of the disturbance. The firemen refused to enter the room and quell the rising flames so long as they were uncertain that its savage occupant was not still there and ready for mischief.

It was at this juncture that the proprietor of the menagerie appeared upon the scene. Reenforced by two of his men, and armed with a cocked revolver in one hand and a heavy bull whip in the other, he opened the door and quickly stepped inside.

The watchers without stood in expectant silence, listening for the sounds of a scuffle.

Five minutes passed—ten; and then the menagerie man opened the door a crack, and peered out.

"We've got him," he announced, "and the fire is out."

The curious crowd surged forward toward the door.

"No, no," interposed the animal keeper, "I don't want no one in here just now except the hotel-keeper and the young feller that had this here thrillin' experience. We'll take the tiger out of the window the way he come in, and to-morrow all the rest of you good people'll have a chance to see him in his cage. He's too savage now to have him excited any more."

Accordingly Crandall and the hotel proprietor passed in alone.

The gas had been lighted, and under its illumination the room presented a scene of havoc.

The bed was completely destroyed, the ceiling scorched, and on the carpet lay pools of water, where the men had emptied the pitcher in extinguishing the blaze.

Over by the window stood one of the menagerie assistants holding by the collar a big yellow dog, which wagged his tail in friendly greeting to the newcomers.

"There," said the showman, a broad grin irradiating his countenance, as he pointed to this spectacle—"there is the ferocious beast that this young gent had such a hair-raisin' tussle with."

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The hotel proprietor gazed darkly over the scene of desolation, and then turned on Crandall with a torrent of Teutonic abuse:

"Dat vas my Fido, you tam' fool," he howled. "Ditn't you know he sleeped in here mit you?"

"But I surely saw a tiger," asserted the bewildered Crandall. "He was standing right there by the window, and I plainly marked the stripes across his back."

The menagerie man lifted the shade and disclosed a row of bars, placed there as a protection.

"It was the shadow of them that you saw," he replied.

"And as for you"—turning to the hotel-keeper, who was still hurling anathemas at Crandall—"you shut up. I'll pay for all the damage that's been done, provided you know enough to keep your head shut about this little shindig. Why, you idiot, don't you understand that the advertisement in it for me is worth more than all your old shack put together?

"Ain't you the fellow that struck me for a job as press agent?" he continued, again addressing Crandall.

"And what are you doin' now?"—when the other admitted that he was the man.

"I have been day cashier in this hotel; but"—with a wan smile in the direction of the angry hotel-keeper—"I guess I've lost my job."

"Well," announced the animal man, "the sooner you get back to your own profession the better for you. You come over and take charge of my press-work for me. A man that's got enough imagination to work up a head-line story like this out of a yellow dog and a few window-bars, is just the fellow I'm looking for."

SHE IS MINE.

THERE'S a sparkle in her eye
That no millionaire can buy—
If they think so let them try—
She's divine.

There's a blush upon her cheek
Like the peach tree's blossom, eke
Like red willows by the creek
Or like wine.

She has roses in her hair;
It was I who put them there,
Really, did I ever dare?
Is she mine?

Or can it be all a dream,
Idle poet's empty theme
Put in words that make it seem
Superfine?

No; for see—upon her hand
There's a little golden band,
Filigree work, understand—
Like a vine.

And a perfect solitaire
Fits upon it. The affair
Cost two hundred. I don't care!
She is mine.

Winthrop Church.

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IN THE DRAGON'S CLAW.*

BY FRANCIS Z. STONE.

The remarkable experiences of a Western editor, whose worst plight was by no means the charge of murder hanging over his head.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

HOLDEN, editor of the Santa Anita *Sun*, is on the verge of financial ruin, when Romeo Powers, a tramp printer, tells him that John Tolt is in town. He immediately seeks Tolt at the latter's hotel, where he finds him in consultation with J. H. Freeze, the man whose enmity has brought about the crisis in Holden's affairs. Morally, Tolt is under obligations to the editor, who was his partner in a disastrous mining venture. He reluctantly agrees to meet Holden at midnight at the depot, when the last train brings him back from a neighboring town. As soon as Holden leaves the hotel, Freeze cautions Tolt against the editor, and succeeds in tying up Tolt's funds. Holden gets a day's time by telling his creditors that he expects assistance from Tolt.

Markell, a friend of Holden, comes in from the desert and brings news of a strange movement among the Chinese. Holden goes to Louis, a Chinaman employed in a drug store, for information, and is warned not to print anything about the Celestials. To his surprise, Markell is alarmed at the warning, and asks him not to mention his name in the newspaper story of the Chinese movement. That night the editor is cautiously told by Louis that his life is not safe, but he arms himself and keeps his appointment with Tolt.

On the arrival of the train, Tolt tries to avoid Holden, who overtakes and upbraids him angrily. Just as peace is made between them, Holden is hooded by a blanket, and after firing wildly is rendered unconscious. When bystanders come upon the scene, Tolt is found murdered. Holden has disappeared.

So strong is the evidence of the latter's guilt that he is indicted after the inquest, and bloodhounds are put on his trail. Markell, who alone believes in his innocence, recovers the trail when the dogs have lost it, and is convinced by footprints that the editor has been carried off by the Chinese.

This is really the case, but after a series of hairbreadth escapes, Holden gets away, only to fall into the hands of a tramp anxious to obtain the reward offered for his capture. Romeo Powers turns up again just in time to save him from this fate, and him the editor sends to Santa Anita with a message to the sheriff, while he himself lies concealed in a clump of sage brush. As a result of his dire experiences, Holden is dirty, emaciated, smeared with blood and burning up with fever. Finally, knowing there is water only a few yard away, he risks all and drags himself to the canal. Here the canal tender (the *zanjiro*) comes upon him, and at once jumps to the conclusion that here is the murderer for whom the big money has been offered. He loses no time in making the capture, and in a few minutes Holden sees a disorderly crowd bearing down upon him. Knowing the nature of the people at *Fiesta* times, he anticipates having a rope around his neck within the next half hour.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LYNCHERS.

IN explanation of what followed, it is necessary to say a word about San Martinez and its *Fiesta*, or feast.

San Martinez was one of the oldest towns in Southern California. In its palmy days it was an outfitting point for the Arizona trail, and headquarters for mining men, cattlemen, and freighters; in the parlance of the locality and time, it was the only place between Los Angeles and Yuma where a man might "get action for his roll."

The traditions of the town were those of the earlier West, and it was jealous of them.

The "Boom" of the early eighties surrounded San Martinez with towns colonized by New Englanders, most of whom had fixed incomes and defective lungs. They introduced the copper cent and prohibited the sale of liquor. And seeing the wickedness of the county-seat, they got a bill through the legislature whereby the county of Santa Anita was added to the map at the expense of San Martinez, which was thus mulcted of the fairest half of a territory as large as the State of Massachusetts, and of two thirds of its yearly revenue.

They were long-headed men at the head of affairs in the new county; the future was to irrigation, and they knew

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it. Therefore they acquired water rights, to the end that San Martinez awoke one day to find that she was dependent for her water supply upon her despised rival, and that it was within the power of the latter to turn her into a desert.

Whenever there was a shortage of water, it was San Martinez that suffered. Her orange groves died, her lawns withered, her shops closed. She ground her teeth and said things.

Because the colony towns were clean, orderly, and intensely respectable, it was a point of honor with San Martinez to be otherwise—in the vague and fallacious hope, perhaps, of shocking the Pharisees.

But when one of the best known citizens of the old town went over to Santa Anita with the purpose of terrorizing it, he was filled with buck-shot by the local marshal, who was an ex-shoemaker of Lynn, Massachusetts.

After the inquest, San Martinez was curtly informed that the remains were at her disposal, and the man who did the shooting was invested with a solid gold badge by his admiring fellow citizens.

These things rankled.

As trade fell away, owing to changed conditions; as the miner, freighter, and cattleman disappeared before the dry rancher, irrigator, and dairyman, the old town came more and more to live by her vices. For a hundred miles around, men who were inclined for a spree betook themselves there.

Once a year San Martinez outdid herself in a three days' *Fiesta*. Other towns had their *Fiestas*, too, but they were floral affairs, in which the feminine element predominated. The chief attractions were Christian Endeavor conventions, parades of secret societies, and elaborate decorations.

The *Fiesta* of San Martinez, on the other hand, was a Saturnalia. For three days "Everything went," and no arrests were made save for felony.

There were bull fights, glove contests, roping matches, cocking mains, faro, roulette, craps, monte, fireworks. A large Mexican population injected an element of picturesque lawlessness by frequent affrays.

From far and near the riff-raff poured into San Martinez for the *Fiesta*, which ended, always, as a debauch *en masse*.

It was nearly noon on the second day of the celebration when Holden was led up the track toward town. And he knew that nothing would suit the temper of the roysterers better than a lynching, unless it were the lynching of a citizen of Santa Anita.

There had been a dozen lynchings in the old days, and less than a year before a Mexican had been swung off the railroad bridge for killing a man.

There is nothing worse than a mob. Its units are without responsibility, and collectively it is the sum total of all the passion which its units generate. It is the hysteria of hate, actuating masses.

Pedro Morello, the rider, halted at the first saloon, which stood near the tracks. There, dismounting, he shouted his news and demanded wine.

The place was full of men, most of them drinking to overcome the effects of the previous night's potations.

It was already known that Holden was in hiding somewhere in the vicinity, and his case had therefore been discussed in every drinking place in San Martinez that very morning.

The crowd was hungry for excitement. Morello's news furnished it.

"Come on, boys," yelled a burly man with a blotched face; "we'll show them fine-haired one-lungers over to Sant' Anita how to run things!"

They poured out, shouting. Those who had horses hitched near by mounted and galloped up the road, while those afoot took to the track.

The man with the blotched face was a well-known character named Fore. He had acquired a competence by selling liquor to Indians in contravention of the law, and therefore possessed great influence.

He rode a pinto horse, and, outstripping his followers, drew up with a jerk in front of Estudillo and his prisoner.

He held up his right hand in token of arrest.

"Your name Holden?" he demanded.

"If you are an officer of the law I will answer your question, not otherwise," answered the editor.

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"That's him, all right!" asserted several of the others, who had come up.

"Good! Hand him over, Cholo. We'll look after him," said Fore grimly.

"But he is my prisoner; I have to take him to the sheriff!" protested the *zanjiro*.

They wasted no time in argument. One of the bystanders grasped the Mexican by the shoulders and threw him aside with a violence that tumbled him into the ditch at the side of the track.

Several others laid hold of the editor, looking to their leader for further instructions.

There was a chorus of demands and suggestions.

"To the bridge with him!" shouted several voices.

Had any one brought a rope, this would have been done forthwith. But inquiry elicited the fact that there was not even a lariat available.

"Some of you crotch a hoss an' take a little run back to the depot," commanded Fore. "You'll find a-plenty of rope in the baggage-room. Get back with it, *pronto*. We'll be a-moseyin' along."

"Hold on, boys!" cried a small man with a very red countenance. "There ain't no hurry about this thing, an' the town'll never forgive us if we hog all the fun. This is the biggest card in the whole pack, this lynchin' is, an' we don't want the crowd that's come to the *Fiesta* to go away complainin' that we thought the best was too good for 'em, an' took it ourselves!"

"That's right, Smith!" assented a number.

"San Martinez ain't got nothin' too good for her guests," solemnly asserted an individual who could barely stand.

"You hear me!" resumed Smith, following up the impression his words had made. "This thing's come along providential like, to put a gilt edge on the whole show. Are we goin' to be such idjits as to waste it? Lynchin's ain't nothin' new to us—why, I don't reckon there's a man here that ain't took a hand in from five to a dozen! But the town's jest plumb rotten with tenderfeet that ain't never seen ary one! Jest think o' that! Say, are we goin' to give 'em a run for their money or not?"

"Sure thing, Smith! We ain't no hogs!"

Fore drew himself up.

"You fellers have got about as much savvy as a band of sheep-herders," he declared with withering contempt. "While you're gettin' your circus ready, along comes a posse, an' snakes your star performer on the tight-rope into the calaboose! Then where are you?"

"Ain't no posse goin' against the whole town," Smith rejoined. "An' the calaboose is nothin' but a shack anyhow. Give me a twelve pound sledge an' I'll go through it anywhere inside of ten minutes!"

The crowd was divided. Those who wished to make the lynching as spectacular as possible supported Smith and urged delay until the town should be notified. Others, with greater experience to guide them, were on Fore's side.

"What's the use," demanded the latter, "of stackin' up against a posse? A fight means good men downed, whichever way it goes!"

"Shaw won't fight! He's up for re-election!"

At this juncture the men who had been despatched to the depot returned with a coil of rope. They were accompanied by a score or so of newcomers, and a glance up the track showed a hundred more hastening to the scene.

During the discussion they had halted with the prisoner. The arrival of the rope brought matters to a crisis.

Fore's statement that they might have a posse to contend with was impolitic. Instead of intimidating the delay party, it hardened their resolution.

Drunk and truculent, there was something attractive to them in the idea of openly defying the authorities, and to yield now would invite reflection upon their courage. Besides, in a perverted sense they felt that the stand they had taken was based on public spirit, insuring them popular support.

The wrangle, which grew more bitter, became fraught with offensive personalities. In the end, probably the Fore crowd would have had their way, but there was an interruption.

Down the road in a swirl of dust came a buckboard, preceded and followed by

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half a dozen horsemen. Upon the seat of the vehicle, immaculate in white flannels, was a thin-faced, smooth-shaven man, wearing gold rimmed eyeglasses. He looked like a professor taking his vacation.

So absorbed was the crowd in the dispute that the buckboard and its accompanying cavalcade drew up unnoticed. The man in white sprang lightly out and made his way through the reeking, vociferating press.

He was one of those men immune to speck or stain through a natural antipathy. From the crown of his Panama hat to the soles of his low-cut, patent leather shoes, there was not a spot on him.

Through the dense mass he passed like a ghost. It melted at his approach, opening a lane from rim to core. Also a silence followed him from the circumference of the crowd inward, so that individual voices became distinguishable.

Presently he stood at the center, in the midst of a breathing silence. With a graceful gesture—for his every movement had in it something high bred and harmonious—he plucked the glass from his eyes, wiped it upon a silk handkerchief, and replacing it, gazed with languid interest at the prisoner.

"I am sorry to see you under such circumstances, Mr. Holden," he said with a slight bow. Then, to the men who still gripped the prisoner's shoulders: "Release him, gentlemen. I will answer for his submission."

Without knowing what impelled them, their hands fell from the editor's person, and he stood alone. He would have fallen had not the other steadied him gently by the arm.

"Lean upon me," he said. "It is but a step to my buckboard, and once at my quarters you will be made comfortable."

A moment later he found himself seated beside his rescuer; the buckboard swung round, the riders wheeled with it, and they were off.

The mob stood staring at each other, empty-handed upon the track.

Fore was the first to recover from the temporary paralysis that had fallen upon all. He burst into a loud and derisive guffaw.

"That's Doc Shaw, sheriff of San Martinez!" he bawled. "What did I tell you? 'Excuse me, gents,' says he, and not an *ombre* peeps! Didn't I tell you how it would be? Say, is Doc Shaw clean-strain? Is he worth the whole hoof-rotten band that was goin' to give that necktie show? Is he?"

"You didn't make no medicine," growled Smith.

And there was a murmur of approval from his followers.

"It wasn't my show," rejoined Fore. "You know what I wanted."

"What in blazes can a crowd do with a man like that?" protested another.

"It was a honey of a bluff, an' Doc Shaw scoops the pot," admitted Smith. "But a bluff don't go with me twice runnin' without a showdown. Does Doc Shaw run this town with his kid glove style? That's what I want to know, an' I'm a-goin' to find out that same, if there's a dozen men with the back-bone of a siwash in this blighted camp!

"Say, are we goin' to let Doc hand that man over to Thrasher of Sant' Anita without a peep? Are we goin' to let them skins over the line have the laugh on us after we've fetched a rope to stretch the neck of their prom'nent citizen? Is this camp gone to Hades in a hand-basket along o' them fine-haired, one-lunged, plug-hatted short-horns from back East? If it is, then I pull my freight for Mexico an' take up with Greasers, for the United States is plumb played out!"

A savage yell greeted this harangue.

"All right!" shouted Smith. "We'll go back to town an' see what the boys have to say about it! Keep that rope, for if there's any grit left in San Martinez, we'll have the jail down an' a man at the end of it before another sun-up! You hear me!"

They swarmed back to town, a disorderly rabble with a lawless purpose which would spread as fire spreads over a dry prairie.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHERIFF OF SAN MARTINEZ.

THE news of Holden's capture had by this time pervaded the town, and a half

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hour later Shaw would have found his passage to the jail blocked. But the crowd had not organized as yet, and he only encountered a hostile curiosity.

Holden was jailed without further incident. Afterward he remembered little except the clouds of dust, and a swarm of faces through which he was hurried.

Then a door was pressed shut against the bodily weight of those who sought to follow, and he found himself lying faint and exhausted upon a couch in the cool quietude of the sheriff's office.

Shaw administered restoratives, dressed his scalp wound, and afforded him facilities for a bath.

Invested with clean garments from Shaw's wardrobe, he looked and felt a different man. Food was set before him, but he fell asleep while eating, so they carried him to the couch and left him there.

Meanwhile a stream of applicants sought admission to the sheriff's quarters. They were denied, for, as a physician, Shaw knew that above everything else Holden needed sleep.

The county jail was a brick building of two stories, across the street from the court-house. Its erection resulted in a scandal which did much to bring about the division of the county.

Jobbery was written all over it. When Smith asserted that he could batter his way through the walls with a sledge hammer, he probably told the truth.

There was something grimly humorous in confining criminals in an edifice which was itself a monument of criminality in office.

The sheriff stepped softly to the door which opened into the cell-lined corridor and called Spangler, the deputy, who did duty as a day warden. He came promptly—a hulking fellow with a hang-dog look.

"Spangler," said Shaw, "you are not a married man?"

"No, of course not. You know it."

"Pardon me, but in this county one is never certain of another's domestic affairs. I am glad, however, that you have no wife dependent upon you. I believe Walsh and Jennison are also bachelors."

"So far as I know."

"Very good. I have telephoned for them. You will admit them when they come."

Spangler shuffled uneasily.

"You expectin' trouble, Doc?"

"There may be a disturbance," answered the other quietly. "In fact, I think the probabilities lie in that direction. Have you looked out of the windows lately?"

"Yes, nobody in sight but a few Mexicans. The crowd's all gone."

"An unfavorable omen, I think. I fancy meetings are being held of which we shall see the result later. How many cartridges have you on hand?"

"I say, Doc, you ain't goin' to fire on 'em if they come, are you? They wouldn't leave one brick on another, an' as for us, we'd be dead men! And you up for re-election, too! Honest, you don't mean to go against the boys?"

Shaw drew himself up.

"As sheriff of San Martinez County I took an oath to enforce the laws. As my deputy you did the same. There is no release from that but death."

"But, my God, Doc, it ain't politics, an' it ain't reason! I ain't no cur, an' you know it, but I don't want to be shot to pieces by my own friends to gain fifteen minutes more life for a murderer from Sant' Anita! For they'll get him after we're downed, so where's the sense in gun-play?"

"That will do, Spangler. You know your duty, and you'll do it. As soon as Holden wakes up we'll put him in the tank. And in the tank is where we'll make our stand. If it appears necessary, I will arm the prisoner on parole. He has the right of trial. Now go and bring me what cartridges you have."

Spangler departed upon his errand with a pale face. But the doctor lighted a cigar and, opening a cupboard, took out and laid upon his table four Winchester rifles and four cartridge belts, each garnished with a pair of navy revolvers.

When the deputy returned he found the sheriff testing the mechanism of the guns by manipulating the levers.

The bell in the office rang violently. The outer door was provided with an

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aperture through which visitors might be scrutinized.

Shaw recognized Drake, editor of the local daily, and a close political friend.

"Let me in, Doc. I've got important information for you."

He shot the bolts and opened the door. Drake was a lean and vehement little man.

"Say, Doc," exclaimed Drake, upon seeing the weapons, "what you going to do? The town's gone loco, and you'll have pandemonium around this old shell within an hour! You can't stand 'em off!"

"I haven't expected anything else, and as for standing them off, I think it can be done, with luck."

"But, good Lord, Doc, you mustn't shoot! Suppose you did manage to hold out, though that's impossible, where's the party? We'd be knocked higher than a kite! Why, when the boys elected you it was with the understanding that San Martinez was to retain her time-honored freedom. You know mighty well that it was his talk against a wide-open *Fiesta* that defeated Bowers of Daggett."

"I know all that. I'm sorry. But there is nothing personal in this matter. I have got to fulfil my oath of office."

Drake walked up and down the room, biting his nails. Suddenly he turned.

"Say, if you are going to take that kind of a stand, what we better do is to notify Thrasher of Sant' Anita to come over and get his prisoner. If he gets here in time, you turn Holden over to him, and let him take the responsibility. I'll try and hold the boys until he comes."

Shaw swept the speaker with a slow and curious glance.

"I don't think you grasp the situation. As long as the prisoner is within the confines of San Martinez, I hold myself responsible for his safety with my own body."

"What did you bring him here for, then? Why didn't you head your buckboard for Sant' Anita? You could have done it then, but now the roads are guarded and you wouldn't get a furlong before they'd have you."

The sheriff made no reply.

"Oh, this is too bad, too bad," Drake went on, wringing his hands. "It's quixotic foolishness, that's what it is!"

"That is a matter of personal opinion. I was raised where the code taught men that honor is paramount to life itself, and the leopard cannot change his spots."

"Well, if you must have it so, get together a strong posse. Swear in a hundred men, and wire the governor to call out Company M."

Shaw shook his head.

"I have made my plans," he said, "I have all the force that I can use to advantage. It is probable that I will not see you again, Drake—good day, and good luck to you."

He shook hands and ushered the editor out, just as the deputies for whom he had telephoned arrived. Drake crossed the street to his office near the court-house, full of anger, contempt, and an unwilling admiration.

Shaw was not the first man elected as a "good fellow" who has taken his office seriously, to the consternation of his supporters.

Walsh and Jennison were good men, and were as well acquainted with the situation as was Drake himself. On their way to the jail ominous glances had been directed upon them from the open doors of the saloons, and more than one friendly warning had been shouted across the street.

The sheriff gave his orders in a few words. They belted on the revolvers, and each took up a Winchester with the magazine fully charged.

Holden was awakened.

"For protection I shall be obliged to put you in the tank," said Shaw. "These three gentlemen and myself will remain with you. The town is disorderly, and there is reason to apprehend that violence will be attempted. We will do the best we can for you."

Even as he spoke yells were heard, the banging of a bass drum, shots, catcalls and war whoops. The rabble was indeed coming.

The tank to which they conducted Holden was a box, constructed of three-eighths inch steel plates, and clamped to the floor. The door was grated, but being composed of the same stubborn material, was as strong as the walls.

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Many Western jails are furnished with a similar casemate for the safe-keeping of desperate criminals. A jug of water and some provisions had been put inside by the sheriff's direction. It was evident that he expected a siege.

The three deputies, Walsh, Jennison, and Spangler, were left in the tank with the prisoner, while Shaw went upstairs to reconnoiter.

They listened in silence.

Presently there was a roar which shook the building. It continued for a long time and died out slowly.

They could hear the level tones of the solitary voice that had come to dominate it.

The sheriff was addressing the mob.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIESTA ENDS.

OVER the door of the county jail the roof of the porch formed a balcony, accessible from a window behind.

On this balcony appeared the sheriff of San Martinez, bareheaded and unarmed.

Beneath him the court-house square was a sea of faces, distorted by the passions which swayed the mob, and inflamed by the strong drink that for nearly two days had been flowing like water.

They had been noisy before he showed himself, but at sight of him they roared.

It was not a roar of hostility; rather it partook of the nature of an ovation. So sure were they of their power that they were willing, for the moment, to forego their purpose while they indulged their boisterous humor by cheering the man they stood ready to kill should he seek to thwart them.

His coup of the morning had been widely discussed. It was admired because it had been successful; it was appreciated as a huge practical joke of which Fore and Smith were the victims.

But they were steeled now against every blandishment that eloquence and intrepidity could bring to bear on them.

Faces everywhere. Even the pillars of the court-house and the low roofs of the buildings across the street upheld festoons and fringes of them.

A bass drum banged continually. A man, who kept a precarious footing upon the shoulders of a companion, blew an enormous tin horn, but the sound was lost in the general tumult.

Here and there the sunlight fell upon the blue barrel of a rifle or the brown of a shotgun, and well to the front was Smith, a sledge over his shoulder. He was accompanied by a dozen others who bore tools hastily looted, in passing, from a blacksmith's shop.

One fatuous individual had even brought the shave wherewith the hoofs of horses are pared.

The sheriff held up his right hand, palm outward. The roar expanded in volume and then by degrees flattened out.

The curiosity of the crowd imposed silence. He spoke.

"Some of you know me, and some of you do not. It is to you who do not that I speak.

"I don't appeal to you to disperse, because my time is too short to waste. But when you have killed me, you men who gave me your support against Bowers of Daggett, I want you to remember this: It was your votes that murdered me.

"The man you propose to lynch has not been tried for the crime of which he is accused. Until he has been found guilty by competent tribunal, the law presumes his innocence. Upon what evidence and with what warrant have you constituted yourselves judge, jury, and executioners?

"The era of lynch law is past. If it was ever justifiable, it is not justifiable now. You are not actuated by the blind passion which avenges the crime of the Black Belt—you are merely seeking, in a time of general license and disorder, to revive a dishonored tradition.

"I am here to uphold that law which, by virtue of his citizenship, guarantees to every man a fair trial. I warn you, for your own safety, and for the fair name of the State of California, not to attack this jail.

"I have placed the prisoner in a steel tank which is bullet proof. He will only be taken from there when there is no longer a man or a cartridge left for his defense.

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"That is all, gentlemen. I thank you."

He turned his back to the mob and passed in through the window.

A momentary silence followed his disappearance. Then the more boisterous, most of them too drunk to heed the words that had just been uttered, broke into yells, cat-calls, and hoots.

The edge of the crowd was agitated like the rim of a boiling kettle. Mere spectators, who found themselves perilously near the front, forced their way out, while others, impelled by curiosity, elbowed a passage inward.

A few sober and prudent men left the court-house square.

Hysteria *en masse* is contagious. Many who came merely to look on at a safe distance found themselves acting as ring-leaders.

When pandemonium recommenced, Smith swarmed up one of the pillars of the jail porch, and gained the balcony recently vacated by the sheriff.

Leaning far over, he formed a speaking trumpet of his hands and bawled down to his followers. At once the clang of iron was added to the din.

Two men, bare-armed and reeking with sweat, smote with alternate strokes upon the door. Their heavy sledges bounded from the plates, and when they tired two others sprang forward and took their places.

Meanwhile the jail was being assaulted at a dozen different points, from which clouds of powdered plaster and brick dust went up—they had even ascended to the roof, which they were attacking with axes and bars.

A tremendous shout arose. Entrance had been simultaneously effected at several places.

High over the savage acclamations of triumph quavered the shrieks of a Mexican who, awaiting trial for a murderous assault, had gone mad with fear in the belief that his time had come. The other prisoners crouched in their cells, or, expecting liberation, added hilarious cries to the tumult.

Those who entered first proceeded with some caution, since they knew not what trap might be laid for them. But as the number within increased all semblance of order was lost, and they swarmed through the edifice like a colony of rats driven up from a cellar by flood.

The passage leading to the latter was barred by a strong door, and whatever may have been the structural defects of the edifice, they did not extend to the foundations.

Forcing the door involved a delay upon which Shaw had counted. Only a few could work together, and the others, impatient of the new obstacle, turned to mischief.

The spirit of destruction speedily animated them; they broke, tore, and smashed. Despite the expostulations of the few who had the sense and courage to denounce the act, they wrenched the cell doors from their beds and freed the prisoners.

They would have hanged or shot the Mexican had they thought of it in time, but his case was not strictly local, and he got away, half dead with terror.

"San Martinez needs a new jail, an' we'll make room for it!" howled a strong lunged rioter.

They took up the cry and the work of destruction proceeded with twofold violence.

Suddenly they grew aware that the place was filling with smoke.

Who started the fire will probably never be known. Among those men, crazed with whisky and excitement, there were not wanting bravos capable of the act.

And, whether by accident or design, the flames had their origin in the lawlessness that directed the attack upon the jail.

So crowded were the corridors—so intent was each man upon the wanton purpose which for the time chanced to actuate him, that before effective measures could be taken to check its spread, the fire was beyond control.

Men poured from the doors, choked and blinded. They leaped from windows beside which the bars hung bent and broken. They dropped feet foremost from the roof through which smoke wisps already ascended.

The court-house square was packed. News that the jail was fired outrang the clangor of the bell in the cupola of the county building.

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And it was known, suddenly, by some subtle process which penetrated the dense concourse like an electrical shock, that Shaw, his deputies, and the prisoner were in the cellar of the doomed building, perhaps unconscious of the horrible fate which was in store for them.

A hush fell so abruptly that the snap and crackle of the flames and the unbroken howling of the sheriff's dog, chained in an upper corridor, were sharply audible.

Not more abrupt than the fall of silence was the qualm of revulsion which shook the throng.

The howling of the doomed animal made palpable and intimate the agonies to which the men in the tank had been given over. Men licked their lips, and, attempting to swallow, found their throats dry at the back.

Then Smith, leader of the lynchers, leaped upon the shoulders of one beside him.

"Come on, boys!" he yelled. "I'm a-goin' back!"

(To be continued.)

Curiosity and the Telephone.

BY OSCAR HATCH HAWLEY.

The queer way in which one reporter secured a choice news item when there seemed to be a dearth of events worth chronicling.

IT was several days since we had had a story any way approaching the sensational. Courts were dry and uninteresting, police cases largely drunks and disorderlies, while club and swelldom were in a somnolent condition well described by that trite newspaper phrase "innocuous desuetude."

As a result, the *Courier* was taking on the appearance of the *City Register*, its columns being filled with many items to the effect that John Jones had bought a lot at 72 Maple Avenue, or William Smith was building a new house on the Mountain Road, or Thomas Robinson had entered suit for the value of his pet cat, which had been chewed up by a neighbor's bulldog.

I had carefully scanned the first editions of the evening papers with the hope of finding some paragraph on which to hang a story, but up to three o'clock my perusal had been ineffective, and I was wondering what my assignment for the day would be, when the city editor called me over to his desk and said:

"Billy, I want you to go out and pick up a story. I don't know what you will find, but I'm getting eternally sick of hearing 'nothing doing,' so now it's up to you."

It had been "up to me" several times before in the course of my career as a reporter, and I had never failed to make good. Usually, when out hunting stories on my own account, they had just naturally seemed to get in my way, or I had stumbled across them by accident. So, although nothing was now in view, I did not doubt that before night something worth while would turn up.

When on such a mission bent, I usually followed one routine, first taking in the hotels and then calling on my legal friends. If those two sources failed, I went to the clubs.

Thus it was that nine o'clock found me at the Chess Club, sitting opposite Oswald Thorne, who was just now deeply immersed in thought, it being his move and the game having reached that point where rapid progress was not conducive to conservative play.

"Looking for a story, eh?" said Mr. Thorne, when I strolled into the club.

"Yes," I replied, "and that reminds me, although I have been here many times I have never thought of asking you for one. Perhaps you have something in mind that would make good reading and is of current interest."

"Perhaps," he said with a good-natured, half cynical smile.

"If you have," I continued, "I wish you would tell it to me, because I'm

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simply aching for a yarn, and must not return to the office until I have one."

He gazed out of the window with an odd stare, and seemed to be absorbed in the electric light scheme in the building opposite. After a moment he said abruptly, without looking at me:

"You play chess?"

I fancied that I played the game, and so answered in the affirmative.

"Well," said Mr. Thorne, "let's have a game. The stakes will be a story. If you win you get it. If I win you don't get it."

"Ah, sort of heads-I-win-tails-you-lose game," I replied sarcastically.

"Not at all, not at all," he answered genially. "If I do not win, the story is yours, don't you see? It will make good reading, it will be of current interest, and I think it will be worth your while to have a try for it."

On the spur of the moment I accepted the proposition, and as we took our seats at a table he bent his gaze on me for a moment as though endeavoring to take the measure of a new opponent.

For many years Mr. Thorne had been a familiar figure to me, but never before had I held an extended conversation with him. He was an austere and reserved man, who seemed to have few friends, and whose one hobby was chess.

Whenever I had entered that club, day or night, I had found him there, and I knew that he was a master of the game. He was an old man, with white, silky hair, a thin, smooth-shaven face, and tall, spare body, but he carried himself with an erectness and suppleness not seen in many young men a third his age.

Who he was, other than a member of the Chess Club and several other exclusive organizations, I did not know. He was always clad in well-fitting garments, which showed that he was at least in comfortable circumstances.

The game had opened with a variation of the king's gambit, but at the fourteenth move I had given him a surprise with a combination of bishop, castle, and two pawns that seemed to worry him not a little. At the eighteenth move victory was in sight.

I was sure I had him beaten, and thought I saw the end of the game only six moves away. But at the twentieth move I was somewhat shocked myself, when he captured my queen by a shrewd use of rooks and knights.

"It will be a draw," he said, looking up smilingly after that.

"I guess you're right," I acquiesced, although at the moment I did not see it and thought that I was beaten.

"Quite surprised that you did not observe my sortie and break it up. From your previous brilliant play, I had no expectation of being able to carry it to a successful conclusion." And the old gentleman beamed on me benignantly.

It was, as he said, a draw, and I felt rather discouraged, for at eleven o'clock at night it seemed a hopeless task to go out seeking a story for the next day's issue.

"We'll try it again to-morrow if you don't mind," he said, extending his hand. "You play a very original game, and I enjoyed it immensely."

"Thanks," I replied. "I enjoy it also, but to-night I was not playing for fun."

"Sorry," he returned sympathetically; "perhaps you will win next time."

"But," said I, a sudden thought striking me, "it was a draw game, and you said you would give me a story if you didn't win."

"Well, well!" he said, stroking his chin. "I believe that is just what I did say. Looks as though you had me, after all."

He looked thoughtful and I hopeful, and after a moment he continued:

"Let's go over to my den. There we will be uninterrupted and in no danger of being overheard. It's only a step."

Ten minutes later we entered a brownstone house in one of the side streets, and ascended a broad flight of stairs. The room into which I was ushered seemed to me something original in the way of dens.

It was fully forty feet long, half as wide, and the walls were hung with rich tapestries, while handsome Oriental rugs covered the floor. In a corner stood a grand piano, and near that a large cabinet containing music.

At one side were several shelves of books, and opposite a broad fireplace, in which logs were burning. A library table piled with magazines and news-

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papers stood at the other end. Several Morris chairs and rockers, with a broad divan near the table, gave the place an appearance of absolute comfort.

The room was electrically lighted, incandescent bulbs being set in walls and ceiling behind ground glass, while on the table was a drop lamp with shade of garnet, lined with some soft, creamy tint that cast glowing, opalescent rays over the light circle beneath.

It was such a room as I had often dreamed of, but never thought to see in reality.

While I was mentally noting the artistic appointments, he had been touching buttons here and there until all the lights except the table lamp were turned off. Then, motioning to a chair, he handed me an evening paper with the remark:

"That contains the germ of the story. Does it mean anything to you?"

Blue pencil marks around a paragraph in the society items indicated the note to which he referred:

Miss Beatrice Goddard arrived from Washington this morning, and will spend a few weeks in the metropolis.

I gazed at the sentence for several minutes, and then said:

"To me it looks like all the rest of the society notes. I don't see that there is any basis for a story in that."

"Perhaps you are right," returned Thorne slowly, with a far away look in his eyes, "but to me it seems quite promising."

"In what way?"

"From the fact that it is now the height of the season in the national capital."

"I see. And she would not be expected to come here, where the season is on the wane, except for the necessity of getting away from her own particular set for a while."

"Very good. You seem to catch on readily," said Thorne smilingly.

"Maybe it's a love affair," I continued.

"Perhaps."

"Or a sudden tightening of the purse strings."

"Hardly."

"Well, what do you think?"

"I don't think. I am positive that if we find the true reason for Miss Goddard's visit here you will have a story that will be thoroughly satisfactory to your city editor, and one calculated to assist your reputation to no small extent."

"I guess you are right. Senator Goddard is in the limelight just now on account of his attitude in the canal matter, and the doings of his family are about as important as anything in the news world. But how did you come to notice it?"

He smiled curiously, with an air of superiority, but did not reply.

"Guess I'd better hustle down to the office and get after this if I am to have it for to-morrow," I said, catching up my hat and starting for the door.

"Sit down," commanded Thorne. "I said I would give you the story, and I will do so. At present I don't know any more about it than you, but I have all the apparatus for gathering the details right at hand, and you can see how I would get it if it was my assignment? In the first place, I am going to call Miss Goddard on the 'phone and have a talk with her."

"But where is she? This note only says that she is in town."

"It's my idea that she must be with some of her relatives. Even if she is not, they will know where she is staying."

"Mrs. De Coster is her aunt."

"Yes, and that is the first place I shall call up."

While speaking he had lifted a corner of the library table and turned it back, revealing a small desk telephone entirely hidden from view from the outside.

"Hold this and you can hear all that takes place," he said, handing me a receiver which was attached to his own like an inspector's instrument.

"But do you suppose she will come to the 'phone at this time of night?" I asked, after he had called for the De Costers'.

"She'll come all right, don't let that worry you," was the answer.

Presently there was a "Hello!" on the wire, and Thorne said:

"Hello, who is this?"

"This is the butler, sir."

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"Well, I want to speak to Miss Goddard."

He didn't ask if she was there, he didn't even ask if it was De Coster's house. He just took it for granted, and gave the man at the other end no chance to say "No" to a question.

I saw the advantage of that plan in a minute, and felt like patting the old gentleman on the back.

"You can't see Miss Goddard, sir; she's retired," said the butler.

"Oh, yes, I can. Just take her my name and she will come to the 'phone fast enough. Tell her that Mr. Busby would like to speak with her."

"I'll tell her, sir, but I don't think she'll come." And we heard the butler's slippered feet retreating along the polished floor.

"She doesn't know me from Adam," I said. "Why did you use my name?"

"Because that is as good as any. Of course she don't know you, or me either, for that matter, and that's just the point. If she did know you she probably would not answer, but not knowing——"

"Oh, I see," I interrupted; "woman's curiosity."

"Exactly."

Then the butler came on again to say that Miss Goddard would be down right away.

"What are you going to say to her?" I asked.

"Haven't an idea at this moment. Will have to wait and see how her voice sounds. I never think up my speeches in advance; they are always extemporaneous."

Presently there was a sound of rhythmical and softly swishing skirts in the telephone room at the De Coster house, and then a faint "Hello" in slightly quavering feminine tones.

"Pardon me for calling you up at this hour of the night, Miss Goddard," said Thorne in a low, musical voice, "but it is a very important matter on which I am obliged to converse with you, and I could not let it go until morning."

"Oh, that's all right, I don't mind it. Whom am I speaking to?"

"This is Mr. Busby of the *Courier*," replied Thorne.

"Yes?"

"I wanted to ask you about your sudden departure from Washington."

"It was not at all sudden. I don't understand what you mean."

"Why, it is hinted in the capital that some little family difficulty was responsible for your visit here, and, of course, we did not want to print anything about it until we had seen you."

"Oh, dear, have the papers got hold of that?"

"I am afraid they have."

"Please don't say anything about it. It was quite horrid of papa."

"That's what we all think."

"But don't say so. That would be terrible."

"Well, you see, we will be obliged to say something. Of course we will handle the matter as gently as possible, but we want to know the truth, and that is the reason we are asking you for information." Thorne's voice was very persuasive.

"I have nothing to say, and I don't think it's at all nice of you to put it in the paper." Miss Goddard spoke with asperity.

"It does have the look of being ungallant, I'll admit," said Thorne, "but, you know, it is now a public matter, and so we must put aside our personal wishes and desires."

"It has nothing to do with the public."

"Ordinarily you would be right, but your father is such a prominent figure in national life that the little escapades of his sons and daughters are of great interest to the public."

"You remember what Mr. Vanderbilt said about the public?"

"Oh, yes, very well."

"If I were a man I would say the same thing."

"What, 'The public be—hanged'?"

"Something like that."

"Then I may quote you as giving expression to that sentiment?"

"No, sir—no, indeed! I never said any such thing. That was purely personal, just between you and me."

"Oh! But you do not deny that the little affair is the cause of your visit here. You know we must say something, and we only want to give the

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truth. If you would tell us your version it might put a different light on the matter."

"I won't, so there. If it hadn't been for that nasty photographer nothing would ever have been known about it."

"Probably his version is correct."

"It isn't—the idea! I was not smoking the cigarette at all."

"On the plate it certainly looks as if smoke were curling up from——"

"Well, it was lighted, but only for effect. I never took but one little puff on it."

"I see. But how did it happen that you were in a place where the photographer could get a view of you?"

"Why, we had been having a small luncheon, and we got to talking of the 'duck dance'—the one that comes off in June, you know—and I said, just in a joke, that I would look stunning dressed that way."

"Ah! And where, pray, did you get the costume?"

"My brother's, of course. It was his yachting suit."

"I might have known as much."

"But say"—suddenly there was a note of alarm in the voice which had been self-assertive and independent the moment before—"but, say, I have said a lot of things I did not intend to."

"Oh, that's all right," rejoined Thorne, in a tone of vast indifference; "with what we already had in our possession it really made little difference."

"What did you have?"

"Shall I read it to you?"

"If you please."

"Very well. But before I do so will you answer one or two questions? I assure you that what I am going to read will cause you more surprise than anything I have said to-night."

There was a brief silence on the wire, and then, evidently, Miss Goddard's curiosity again predominated, for we suddenly heard:

"Well, what is the question?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Thorne humbly; "I just wanted to ask if you really intended to go to the ball dressed as shown in the photograph?"

"Indeed not."

"And how did you happen to get caught by the photographer?"

"We took a romp out in the garden, never thinking any one would see us, and that man just walked out of the kitchen and took snapshots of us; said he guessed a few of those would pay him better than a year's work."

"He was the cook, then?"

"Of course. But he promised on his honor never to say a word about it after papa had bought him and the pictures and the camera and the films. I don't see how you know so much about it."

"I'll explain all that in a minute, and exonerate the photographer, too. Was your father very angry?"

"He certainly would not have sent me away from Washington if he had not been terribly—but say——"

"And for how long is your banishment?"

"Only until after the dance. But say——"

"Yes?"

"You are asking too many questions. Please read me what you promised to."

"Certainly." Thorne's tone was one of great magnanimity. "Here it is: 'Miss Beatrice Goddard arrived from Washington this morning, and will spend a few weeks in the metropolis.'"

"Go on."

"That is all."

"Wh-h-what? Then how did you know so much about it?" Miss Goddard spoke as though dazed, perplexed, bewildered.

"You see, Miss Goddard, I had the basis of it in the knowledge that you would not have left Washington when the social life there was in full swing if something extraordinary had not occurred. By a little adroit questioning you told me the whole story."

"Then you lied to me."

"Oh, no, never, I couldn't be guilty of such a thing. Just think over what I said and you will see that your charge is baseless."

"I'm afraid I've been a fool."

"Certainly not." Thorne jumped to her defense.

"And you are going to print all that story?"

"If you have no serious objections."

"But I have most serious objections."

"Think how I have worked to get it. Truly I will write it so nicely that it

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will not appear at all sensational. And think what a good joke it will be on your father."

"Oh, dear, I can't help but laugh! Papa would simply have a fit if he should read it, and he thinks he has it all hushed up."

"It will be the best joke of the year."

"Don't bring me into it. Don't say anything to let him know that I have even spoken to you."

"Your wishes shall be observed in every particular, Miss Goddard, and I want to thank you very much."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

When Thorne dropped the 'phone I laughed uproariously for several minutes, while he sat with a complacent smile on his countenance.

"There's your story," he said at length.

"Mr. Thorne," I said when I could get my breath, "where did you learn that trick?"

"That was not in our bargain," he replied. "Perhaps I will tell you after another game of chess."

And there was in his voice a faint note of irony which left me wondering, as I rushed for the office, just who and what he was.

BY THE ENEMY'S WILL.*

BY BURFORD DELANNOY.

The fearsome experiences of a new tenant, involving the strange solution of a dark mystery.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOOD NEWS.

HOW long I sat stonily staring at Watson Ward I know not. It seemed hours—was probably moments.

When the room came to a stand-still, the detective was smoking as quietly and smiling as pleasantly as if we had been discussing a future tense of the weather: the possibility of a fine day on the morrow.

My feelings?

It is useless to attempt to describe what they were. His words seemed as if placed on an anvil with half a dozen blacksmiths hammering them—my brain the anvil.

He had discovered—knew then? In all the fear, I somehow thought of the cigar and sanctum; wondered what he would do. Gave voice to my thoughts, saying:

"You know that?"

"Fortunately for you," he replied quietly, "I not only know that, but much more."

"More!"

Starting to my feet, about to step forward, I was restrained by a gentle hand. The detective pushed me back into my seat.

"Sit down—and simmer down, too. There is no reason for a scrap of excitement. You have nothing to fear."

"But—but you have found this out," I said, somewhat incoherently. "All through a dead cat with a ribbon round its neck."

He laughed; it was the first time that I had heard him laugh really heartily. He was a man more given to smiling than noisy mirth.

Perhaps he had both office manners and a sanctum style; possibly I was experiencing the latter.

"I dismissed that cat from my mind very, very early in the investigations."

"Do you," I inquired, "imagine that I am guilty of the murder of that man?"

"Oh, dear, no! Not for a moment!"

Something seemed to break with a snapping sound in my head.

"And of course you believe that I placed the body in Kane's chambers?"

"Not for a moment."

I was really aghast. He had discovered, and yet not drawn the apparently inevitable inference from his discovery.

**This story began in the January issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The six back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 60 cents.*

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Truly he was a man of miracles. I stammered:

"You d-don't b-believe it!"

Watson Ward appeared to be chewing the cud of an inward satisfaction. I never saw a man look more thoroughly content: more supremely pleased with himself. He said quietly:

"Never have done so."

"I can't tell you," I cried, "oh, I can't tell you how much—much easier you have made me in my mind."

Which was quite true. A dictionary of words would not have sufficed to describe the sense of relief I experienced.

"Oh," he remarked cheerfully, "I shall make you even more easy before you leave."

"Do you mean," I said, acting a gray lie, "that you have discovered—will tell me how the girl was killed?"

"No." An enigmatic smile curled his lips as he answered. "I don't mean that, because"—he leaned down and fixed me with his steely eyes—"you know quite as well as I do the method adopted in killing her!"

"H-how?"

I stammered the one word; my tongue refused to serve me further.

"Just as clearly as you know by whom she was killed! That, however, is not altogether what I meant when I said that you would be more pleased by other tidings I should give you."

"Then I stand in no fear," I went on, my heart in my mouth, "of being arrested for the man's murder?"

"Not the shadow of a chance of it."

"Thank God!"

"I told you," he said, still smiling, "that you needed to have no fear."

"But if it is found out that the man died in my rooms, and that I carried him away——"

"It would be considered," he interrupted, "a very senseless piece of work on your part! And distinctly it was. You have an idea of your own that the truth is not always the best card to carry up your sleeve. I am bound to admit—by the manner in which you won the game with the jury at the Central Criminal Court—that there is a certain strength in your argument."

"But I saw——"

"I have seen a lot more of crime and a deal more of life than you have. Believe me, when it's possible to plank down the card of truth it generally rakes the pool. You ought—in this instance—to have told the truth. Any way, to have acted up to it. Then you would have experienced none of the worry through which you have been, nor submitted Mr. Kane to the annoyance and trouble to which he has been put."

"But——"

He stopped me; or rather my interruption did not stem the even flow of his talk. Just a raised hand and he proceeded:

"I know perfectly well that, personally, you intended him no trouble. But your foolish action led to its falling on him. Fortunately, he's a light-hearted—if I may say so—devil-may-care sort of man. Apart from the horror of the thing, I believe he really revels in the notoriety into which it has brought him; so that no great amount of harm has been done. Had you, in the first instance, called in the police, I assure you that you would not have suffered a moment's annoyance: the case spoke for itself."

"If you only knew," I said, "what I endured; the agony of mind during the time I was waiting trial in the other case——"

"Yes, yes. I know. I realize all that perfectly. Personally, I can't find it in my heart to blame you for what you did. I was only saying what, if ever the affair gets into the newspapers, other people will be inclined to call you: every kind of fool they can lay their tongues to.

"However, we need not discuss that. If the thing can be kept quiet, so much the better for all concerned; I am hoping it will be. There has been no crime committed, because the man was dead. You have heard, I suppose, the result of the coroner's inquest? The man had a diseased heart and came to quite a natural death; probably due to over-excitement."

This was welcome news to me; I had not heard a word of it. It was a further relief to my anxiety. I said:

"Of course, I see the point of all you say. At the same time, don't mind my

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remarking that it is so easy to be wise after the event."

"Well, let us dismiss that part of it, and come to another phase of the affair. One which I think you will find still a further relief. You don't seem curious about it. Don't even ask me what it is I have to say to you that can be of a cheering nature."

"During the last few weeks," I answered, "so few cheering elements have come into my life that I have almost forgotten the meaning of the word. If I tell you that I was so downcast, so utterly hopeless, that when the jury acquitted me I fainted—not so much from joy as from sheer, absolute weakness—you will not wonder perhaps at my thinking you can have very little to say to me that can cheer."

He smiled. Again there came that pleased expression on his face. After a moment's pause he observed:

"You think not? Well—so much the more, perhaps, will you relish the news."

"If you know," I answered, "the nature of a step I have taken since my acquittal, an irretrievable step, one which I can never undo, you would realize that my future can't have any very great pleasure left in it."

"Don't be too sure," he said kindly. "I told you that I should have cheering news for you, and I think you'll find it so."

"Tell me—what is it?"

"Well," he bent down and spoke impressively, "what should you say now if I told you to consider yourself a free man?"

"Oh," I answered carelessly, in the fulness of my misunderstanding, "you told me that a little while ago: that I had nothing to fear."

"I don't mean of the danger of arrest. I mean freedom in the stricter sense of the term. There are other—harder, more binding—links forged, you know, than those steel ones a policeman carries in his coat-tail pocket."

It interested me, this mysterious way he had of breaking the news to me. But I had no suspicion of its import.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, for instance, there are such things as marriage fetters."

Still I could not grasp it all. But there was so grave a manner about his utterance, there seemed such a kindly intent, that I knew he must mean something for my welfare.

"If it is good news," I said, "of whatever nature, for God's sake don't keep me on tenterhooks longer. Tell me what it is."

"Very well. I will. When I said you were a free man I meant it. Meant that you need expect no scrap of trouble to arise from the marriage ceremony you went through with the strong woman of the Hippodrome."

"No?"

"You need not say that interrogatively. If I may be allowed the seeming contradiction, it is a positive negative: The woman Zairbeni will never trouble you again."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WATSON WARD TAKES UP THE STORY.

I—WATSON WARD, private detective—have been asked to put the finishing touch to this narrative.

I am afraid the varnish should be applied by a more skilled hand than mine. Following the trail of the pen is but little in my line: I am more sleuth-hound than scribe.

Beyond saying that I know very little of what has gone before, I will make no apology, but at once dip pen in ink, set the machinery in motion, and trust that—in the interest excited by clearing up—the penman's defects will pass unnoticed.

There was but little publicity over what came to be looked on as the second edition of the Gray's Inn affair; the result of the coroner's inquest killed the excitement.

I put the whole matter before the authorities; when I had found it out, and the proofs of it. They treated the whole thing in the usual pill taking manner: made a face and swallowed.

Death having taken so large-sized a hand in the game, it was resolved by the powers that be that no good purpose would be served by publication of details. I got the usual lecture about interference in the administration of jus-

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tice, but that is such a usual form of receipt for the information I am at times able to give the Scotland Yard authorities that water on a duck's back becomes a poor sort of illustration of its effect on me.

When Mr. Kane instructed me to clear up the mystery, I did so. It was not a very lengthy job, but his payment was made with a three-figured check. Coupled with the government reward which—much to the chagrin of Scotland Yard—has been paid to me, I have not found it a profitless task. Nor, I am pleased to add, a thankless one.

It is not often that I allow sentiment to interfere with my playing of the cards I hold in a game. A cold business attitude in detective work is one of the all-wool-warranted-not-to-shrink kind—wears well.

In this case I made an exception. Because just as the speech made by the prisoner on trial for murdering the girl fetched the jury, so it fetched me. Excuse the slang, please, but I can't lay pen to a more expressive word.

People nowadays laugh at a suggestion of inspiration, and scoff at the idea of a hand of Providence. But I am inclined to think—old-fashioned as it may be so to do—that there was something more than human in the way those convincing words of the prisoner's dropped from his lips in the dock.

However, I don't want to raise or discuss any theological question. Let it suffice that I thought the man inspired—whether he was or not does not matter—let us leave it at that.

I mention it as an excuse for the departure I made from my usual lines: the allowing of sentiment to creep in; the feeling of a desire to help the falsely accused man.

What made me think there was any link between the murdered girl and the finding of the man's body? Well, I don't know, unless you are prepared to admit the existence of such a thing as detective instinct. If you can do that, without hurting your reasoning powers too much, we shall travel through what I have to say on pneumatic tires.

The two things occurred within a few weeks; on two top floors, but one house dividing them, and at both inquests medical examination revealed the existence of diseased hearts. Link them? Yes; I did.

Sometimes a detective starts on the wrong road. That is bad for him, because he is usually a long while getting back in the right way again. Going back in your traces is as bad as going up hill. I don't say that I have never done this. I don't want to pose as a bulky-sized, egotistical ass.

In the Gray's Inn affair, however, I struck the right road at once. Walking on it was as easy as motoring; there was scarcely a concealed bump on it.

I don't think that a detective's work is like a phrenologist's—but there, you don't want to know what I think, do you? You want to know about the Raymond Buildings business.

How I found out the use to which Mr. Kane's skylight had been put was an easy matter.

Naturally, I thought of that means of reaching the roof in connection with the tragedy at No. 1. Cursory examination excited the belief that there was no other way of reaching it.

I had thirty minutes to spend in the No. 1 suite of rooms; a superficial glance revealed nothing to me.

We are all creatures of habit, and it is one of my weaknesses, when in doubt, to walk with lowered head, hands behind me, up and down the chamber I may be in, widening my track, as it were, at each turn.

So I did in the rooms of No. 1, seeming to think better that way. In one of the strides I came on a creaking floor board.

Halting, I mechanically pressed and shook it with my feet. I claim no credit for cleverness: any man deep in thought might have done the same.

Had there been anything else to handle—the phantom of a clue to occupy my attention—perhaps I might have disregarded that gentle squeaking hint. As it was, I went on one knee and turned the corner of the carpet back: as a result I found myself looking at a loose board.

Nothing uncommon about that in these days of incomplete electric light installations, when the men need to

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look after the connections so often. But —well, great events from little causes spring.

Lifting the board, I started at what I saw—it is sometimes the unexpected which happens—and then knew that that luck of mine which never seems to desert me was working in the same good old way in my favor again.

Luck? I must have been born under the star of it!

There was a coat tucked down between the joists. I recognized it in a moment by a description of the pattern of the waistcoat and trousers which I had read.

The latter had been on the body of the man found in Mr. Kane's rooms. Even a detective finds assistance from the columns of a newspaper, you see.

To search the pockets of the coat was the work, to my practised hand, of a moment. I drew blanks in each, except the breast pocket.

There I found pinned together at the top corner some sheets of paper.

A glance at the first determined me. I put them in my pocket, and, finding nothing more in those of the coat, replaced the garment, put back the board, and flung the carpet over it.

Then I left that room and walked to the one in which was the bed. Paused there—it was the one with the skylight in the roof—and gazed up at it fixedly.

I knew now—by reason of the coat—that that had been used in connection with the dead man.

It made me pause—wondering. It was most unlikely that any person other than the tenant would have known of that floor board hiding place, or have secreted the coat there. That rather jumbled up my idea of things.

Yet, if that were so, a perusal of the first of those sheets of paper I had taken from the coat pocket and put in my own would surely have shaped things differently. I concluded that in putting the coat away—perhaps hurriedly—the pockets had not been examined.

The room with the skylight forming part of its roof was a bedroom. It behooved me to make more careful examination this time: because I felt sure, where before I had only suspected.

The coverlet showed on it a square-shaped dirty patch. Closer examination revealed that it had been caused by water.

Water? That set my wits at work. Why should the bed be damp at all, and why the square patch?

Up went my eyes, and the theory was at once formed—from the shape of it—that the skylight had been left open and rain had come in.

That filled me full of thought. Eyes as well as brain were busy. I was taking in everything in sight and trying to fit things: ladder shape. I had a problem to solve. How was the light reached?

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT THE POINT OF THE KNIFE.

Floor and roof—what was the medium employed for linking together the two? That was what I was puzzling to find.

A careful scrutiny of the furniture, article by article, revealed to me boot marks on the top of the chest of drawers: some one had stood on it.

That was, perhaps, a half-way explanation of the difficulty.

I looked at my watch; ten minutes had gone. There was need to work quickly if I proposed finishing within the half hour.

Running to the outer door, I slipped the bolt. Then back in the bedroom, wheeled the bed away, and pushed the chest of drawers in its place.

Even then it was not high enough to enable a man to climb out, especially if burdened with a dead body.

How had the man who carried it worked? Or had the owner of the coat been alive and able to help himself through the skylight?

No. There would not have been need for hiding the coat in such a case.

Every man has his pet methods—I have mine: I adopted one then. Put myself in the other man's place, and adjust my considering cap.

Human nature is much of a muchness: less variety about it than is usually supposed. What should I have done under similar circumstances? A look round and I decided.

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Put something on top of the drawers. There was a box in the corner; in another moment it was in the middle of the room. Examining it, I found more boot-marks.

In another minute I had the box on top of the drawers, had climbed, pushed open the skylight, and was standing on the roof.

Examination showed that one of the panes of glass had been taken out of the frame. It had apparently been lifted and replaced, kneaded bread being used instead of putty in the process.

That substitute looked only a day old, the dryness of the bread told me that. Had it been there a longer time, the rain of the preceding two days would have washed it soft.

Rain! Standing on top of my scaffolding, I looked down at the bed: the square patch.

The thing was explained: the skylight had been thrown back, and so the bread had been protected from the weather. That gave me another idea.

Hurriedly examining the roof, I traced footsteps along it not only to No. 3 but away on to No. 6. This took some little time.

At No. 6 I cautiously peered through the skylight, and noted that there were steps—apparently often used steps, to judge by the absence of dust on them—leading down to the room, similar to those in Kane's chambers.

I said absence of dust—if a man had used them that would have been apparent in the middle only. Here they were clean at the sides, too. That told me another story: that the swish of a woman's skirts kept them clean.

The old French proverb occurred to me: Look for the woman.

I came from the roof, closing the light after me, and replaced the furniture. So far I was satisfied.

Next minute I had shot the bolt of the outer door, and was waiting the return of the two men who, thirty minutes before, had left me.

They were disappointed when I told them that, although I undertook the case, I could tell them nothing then. I promised to write, and then, having an urgent appointment at the office, bade them good-day and departed.

Pressing as was the nature of the case which was awaiting my attention, I found time as I left the Inn to drop in at the porter's lodge.

"Top floor of No. 6," I said. "Can you tell me who lives there? There was no name on the side of the entrance-way."

I had looked for it in passing, and noticed that where names of tenants are usually painted the space allotted the top floor was vacant.

"North or south side, sir?"

"North."

The porter scratched his head—I know that scratch: it comes from the regions of doubt.

"I don't exactly know her real name, sir; I know what she plays under."

"Plays?"

"Well, yes. I suppose you'd, in a manner of speaking, call it a sort of play-acting. Zairbeni. She's the strong woman at the circus."

I have cultivated control of my features, which enables me to keep them well in check: I exercised the power then.

I hurried back to the office, kept my appointment, and, concluding the business of the day, determined to call on the strong woman.

I went again to Gray's Inn, for the second time that day; although, to be quite correct, it was evening now.

In response to my knocking at Zairbeni's door there ensued the deep baying of a hound. That surprised me a little; I thought a big dog a strange occupant of a flat.

The second knocking had no better result; no human sound came.

I am in a measure wrong in saying that. My repeated knocking brought the servant to the door of the opposite flat. She volunteered an explanation:

"She always goes out at this time, and won't be back till a good bit after eleven o'clock; she's a hactress."

Having thanked the maid, I went down-stairs slowly. A strong woman and a big hound—to judge the latter by its mouth.

It struck me that that was a combination needing something to meet it. With that object in view I sought a gunsmith's.

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Entering the shop, I acquired that something. It had six little mouths which could bite as well as bark. Having slipped cartridges into it before leaving the shop, I felt equal to quite a liberal supply of strong women and dogs.

A cab took me to the Hippodrome.

The program told me that Zairbeni did two turns. An exhibition of strength in the first part, and a knife throwing performance in the latter half of the show.

There was a foot-note on the program concerning her cutlery display.

In deference to the expression of opinion of the licensing authorities on the danger attending knife throwing displays when the target is faced by a human being, the management has eliminated that element from Mme. Zairbeni's marvelous act. Although the skill of this accomplished artiste is so great that the element of risk is reduced to a minimum in her knife throwing, yet a dummy figure is used instead of the human being who was in former exhibitions pinned to the target board.

On Monday night next Mme. Zairbeni will introduce for the first time in Europe the extraordinary feat of hurling with both hands fourteen sharp-pointed knives into the air, which knives will descend around her, and bury their points in a circle in the board upon which she will stand with her trained hound Boris. This is admittedly the most extraordinary display of skill ever attempted by any living artiste.

Watching the display of her strength, I realized the more completely how easy the lifting of the skylight and frame had been!

In the arena, Zairbeni raised a grand piano with four grooms clinging to it, and apparently did not turn a hair.

Strong? It is an ordinary, commonplace word: does not describe the extraordinary strength the woman exhibited.

I sat out the other turns on the program, watching for Zairbeni's second appearance.

A board was put up, easel fashion, and the dummy figure of a man propped against it. Then, in the midst of a flourish of trumpets from the band, and limelight from the roof, Zairbeni entered.

With her knives she picked out the figure on the wooden target, throwing the weapons from the other side of the ring.

In a moment it flashed on me—the removed pane of glass, the girl lying on the bed beneath, the skill of the knife thrower!

When Zairbeni retired from the arena, I retired from the auditorium.

Lighting a cigar, I waited at the stage door for her coming out. She told her cabman to drive to Raymond Buildings, Theobalds' Road.

So spake I to another cabman. I pulled my man up a hundred yards away and alighted, was walking on the pavement as she got out of the cab at the Inn gates.

By the time she had rung the bell and the porter opened the gate, I was close to her; we passed in one after the other. The porter probably supposed we were together, seeing that I had a few hours prior inquired about the woman.

Any way, he asked no questions nor made any demur at my entrance.

Once in the Inn, I walked ahead of her, just a few paces, till I reached No. 5. Then, in drawing my handkerchief from my pocket, I carelessly pulled out some coppers with it.

Most stupid of me—because I had so often done the same thing before!

As I had intended, Zairbeni passed me as I stooped to pick up the coins. She entered No. 6 and started the ascent of her three flights of stairs.

It cost me twopence-halfpenny, that little ruse, for I could not see to find the coins in the dark.

When I, too, entered No. 6, she was a flight ahead of me.

We went up-stairs. She quietly, I humming a coon song.

Coon songs are so downright soothing if you feel at all excited, and I admit that my nerves were tingling a little as I seemed to be reaching my goal.

By the time she had the key in her lock and the door was swinging on its hinges, I had reached her side. Lifting my hat, I said politely:

"Mme. Zairbeni?"

In the dim light of the landing gas, I saw her face harden.

It was not, possibly, the first time

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that a man had followed her home. I inwardly smiled as I thought of the combined reception the man would be likely to receive, should she decide that she did not care to make his acquaintance; were he not to her liking: a strong woman and a dog! Courage would be needed to face that combination. Noticing the look on her face, it became my endeavor to efface it. I said:

"Pray don't—I beg of you—let there be any misunderstanding. I came here purely on a matter of business."

That wrought a change; an immediate change. She had been barring the way: she barred it no longer.

On the contrary, opened wider the door; she stood aside, signifying that I should enter. I did so, she following and closing the door.

In an inner room a twist of her fingers changed a gas light the size of a pea to that of a fish tail, and in the full light we stood looking at each other.

Neither seemed to care to break the silence, and we remained so—taking each other's measure—for a full minute.

Did I say in silence? That was not quite correct. There was distinctly audible the whine of pleasure which came from an animal sniffing at the crack of the door in the adjacent room.

The mistress had come home; the hound's growls were reserved for the reception of unaccompanied strangers.

Zairbeni slowly took from her hat the spikes with which she impaled it to her head; just as slowly ran them into her hat again when she held it in her hand. Still maintained silence—evidently she wanted me to speak first.

It is rude not to oblige a lady, so I spoke.

"Zairbeni," I said, dropping the prefix, and perhaps with it a degree of politeness, "I have an unpleasant task to perform."

She looked up. Seemed to gather from my tone rather than from my words that there was something not altogether right. Inquired sharply:

"Who—vot are you?"

"A detective."

My description was intended to fall as a miniature bomb-shell, scattering her self-possession.

I was not disappointed. My announcement had the desired effect.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BOW DRAWN AT A VENTURE.

She started but slightly, controlling herself by pressing her teeth into her under lip.

She did not look pretty that way. All the same I was glad to see the action; it told me all I wanted to know: that she feared.

The movement was momentary. As she regained her composure I saw that the teeth marks were deep to bleeding point; that there was no need for the playing of a covert game.

"You guess, of course, the reason for my being here? You murdered the girl at No. 1 by dropping a knife through the lifted glass of the roof straight into her heart?"

She went very pale, but otherwise betrayed no emotion. I am always willing to give the devil his due: the woman was no coward.

"Naturlich, mine husbant—mine husbant half told you zis? Eh—vot?"

Married! That startled me. Girl murdered in a man's rooms not for robbery—then for what? First answer and last: jealousy.

So then there was a possible explanation: she was married to the man who had been tried for his life. And this strong woman had been in court watching him during his trial.

I remembered seeing her there: she was not a woman easy to forget.

I must know more. So I answered:

"He did not tell me a word of it."

"You lie!"

"Sometimes," I answered, with a good humored smile—cruel, perhaps, but business thickens our skins. "Not now. If he knows you were the murderess I did not know he knew it."

"Ze dog!"

"Perhaps. Lots of husbands are. But he did not bark that out."

"Mine husbant!"

"You don't seem to be burdened with a large-sized approval of him."

"Approval! I marry him for reffenge!"

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"Ah! Sort of union that does not last long or wear well."

"Long! Ve vere marry but zis morning."

I did not whistle, although I should have liked to. Things were growing so clear. She asked:

"How did you——"

"Find out? That is my business, you know—I am a detective."

"You are von devils!"

"Minus horns and tail. But don't let us waste time in compliments. Let us get to business."

"You zink you can arrest me?"

"Why ask? Do you suppose that I am not big enough? For all that, I think I could if I tried."

She smiled contemptuously, and, as she made a swift movement in the direction of the room where lay the dog, she said:

"Efen the strongest of strong vomans haf need of a protector. You know not vot a powerful friend I haf here."

"*Stop!*"

I spoke that one word in a staccato, top note just as her hand rested on the handle of the door.

It sounded sharp enough to make her turn her head, and, if possible, her face went a shade paler when she saw the revolver in my hand.

"You love your dog?"

I asked the question, and then, not waiting for her reply, continued:

"If you allow but his head to show in this room, it will be the signal for me to put one of these bullets in it. Don't think I can fail," I continued, seeing her hesitation. "I am as skilful with the pistol at a target as you are with knives."

Her hand fell away from the door handle: the whining sound beyond alone broke the silence. Sensible of her nearer presence, it grew louder.

Stooping, her mouth close to the door, she called through in tones scarcely audible to me something in Austrian to the animal.

"Be wise," I continued, as the whining ceased. "Sit down and don't attempt foolishness. I have four men waiting on the landing outside, and three on the roof. At the first report of this revolver, they would be inside this room, and before your hound had quivered his last death throes."

A neat lie, on occasion, does not come amiss to me.

Of course I had not any men on hand. As a matter of fact, I always work single-handed: if I make a mistake then there is only myself to swear at. On this occasion my inventive effort served its immediate purpose. She sat; said slowly:

"Zis means my arrest? Eh—vot?"

"I suppose so," I answered, shrugging my shoulders. Then, having my own end in view, added significantly: "But not by me."

The tone made her look up in astonishment. I could see in her face what she was thinking: that perhaps, after all, I knew nothing, and was but trying to bluff her into an admission.

She committed herself to the simple inquiry:

"Not?"

"No. I am employed, as a matter of fact, by Mr. Kane. The regular police step on the scene after I leave."

"Mr. Kane?"

"Yes. What made you rip up his roof and dump the body down into his chambers rather than those of any other of your neighbors?"

It was a bow drawn at a venture. My luck stood me in again.

Watching her intently, I saw her doubts give way to a despairing certainty. She walked right into the trap.

"It was ze only von of ze seex houses—save zis—viz ze steps leading down into ze room."

"I thought perhaps you might have some sort of ill-feeling toward Mr. Kane?"

She shook her head; it was plainly evident that she had not. Then she said inquiringly:

"Ze game is lost—vot is galled all up? Is it not so? Eh—vot?"

"I am afraid so. Sooner or later things are always discovered—murder will out. I am glad there was no ill-feeling against the gentleman who employed me."

"Kane?"

"Yes."

"I do not know him efen from sight."

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"Any way, being a woman, you know what a thing scandal is. Would you mind putting into writing that you were a stranger to Kane?"

She laughed bitterly. In her mirth there was a certain amount of contempt as she said:

"A gonfession?"

"Well—not quite that."

"Gome," she said suddenly, "bargains for bargains. I will write you a gonfession out of it all from ze fairst to ze last and sign it—on condition."

"The condition?"

"Zat you not try to arrest me zis night—make until to-morrow night no attempt."

"That you may escape?"

Again she laughed contemptuously. I think, could I have read her mind, that I should not have found myself rated very high in her opinion.

"Look I like a vool woman? Am I—with my big shapes—a voman who gould hide herselfs vith ease?"

She drew herself up as she spoke, in unconscious pride of her magnificent physique.

Truly, she would have had difficulty in disguising herself. The nobility of her carriage, the Amazonian breadth of shoulder and length of limb, would have attracted attention wherever she might go.

As she stood before me in her monumental grandeur, she seemed not so much a woman as the type of womanhood: woman glorified, exalted, uneclipsed.

"I pledge you mine vaird"—she raised her hand in a solemn, majestic gesture—"I vill not attempts to leaf Londons."

I thought a moment. That suggestion of a confession—coming from her—got me out of a little difficulty. I said:

"I agree. Write."

She was not a fool; she understood. Saw in my face that I meant to play straight.

For many minutes there was no sound in the room save the scratching of the pen on the paper she had drawn toward her, and that other made by the dog in the adjoining room; he had begun to whine again.

She signed and handed me the document. After reading and folding it I put it in my pocket.

"Show me the way out," I said.

And then, impelled by some sudden impulse, strangely foreign to me, I added: "Such a woman as you are must be a divinity or a devil; you have chosen your part, and the pity of it is great."

She saw me to the door.

I had accomplished my purpose. Arrest? Oh, that is the business of the regular police. They had the same ground to work on as I had. If they failed—well, they failed.

I was acting really for Mr. Kane. Arresting people is no business of mine.

"Your mans on ze rooves?"

"Will not trouble you. They leave it when I leave the building. Your place, for the present, will be undisturbed."

She opened the door, and I passed out. On the landing I turned once again to look at her.

She had got her color back, some of her self control. As a matter of form I said:

"Till to-morrow."

She understood, signified it by a nod. Her verbal answer was:

"Goot-by."

At home I put the confession with the papers I had taken from the coat. The first one of those pinned-together documents was a letter from the murdered girl to her father. It read:

MY DEAREST FATHER:

I received the two keys and will do your bidding. But oh, I do wish you had not asked me to do this! The papers are yours, you say, and surely if you applied to the person who purchased the desk he would let you have them. I quite understand the push of the secret drawer which you describe, and will, one night when the offices are closed, enter and get the papers out, and send them to you.

You need have no fear, father, because when you were clerk in the offices there, I came to see you twice, you will remember, so I know the rooms and the desk quite well. I do so wish——

But there, that is enough of the letter. Sufficiently far as it affects this history.

Papers concealed in the desk—whether rightfully or wrongfully mat-

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ters not—father desired the daughter to procure; with a result which has been described.

Poor girl! She suffered for another's sin. That is unfortunately more frequently the case than that the evil-doer reaps the consequences.

In the morning I went to the registry office and parish church.

Both husband and wife living in Raymond Buildings prior to marriage, there was no difficulty. I came away with a copy of the certificate of marriage.

That, I think, clears up everything? No, there is one other matter. And that is best explained by an extract from the *Star* published on the day following my midnight visit to No. 6.

This morning, before the opening of the Hippodrome to the public for the matinée, a fatal accident of a peculiarly unpleasant nature occurred.

It is the custom with the performers to rehearse their performances in the ring in the morning before the Hippodrome opens, so that they may get used to their surroundings. Mme. Zairbeni—the well-known Austrian artiste—who was recognized in this country and on the Continent as the champion strong woman of the world, was practising an act which preliminary announcements foreshadowed would be given to the public on Monday next.

Alas, that performance will never take place! The peculiar feat Mme. Zairbeni was practising was that of standing on a board, with her hound Boris, the animal's forelegs being on her breast. In that position the artiste hurled into the air, with both hands, fourteen sharp-pointed knives. These were thrown so as to fall and bury their points in the circle in the board, around Mme. Zairbeni and her dog.

From what the attendants say, the talented artiste had been rehearsing this extraordinary feat for some weeks past, success always attending her efforts—she never sustaining so much as a scratch. But at this morning's rehearsal there happened that which has thrown a gloom over all engaged in the building.

Three of the knives failed to reach the boards; one went into the brain of the dog, the two others into the woman, one in her breast and one in her head. The death of both woman and dog was instantaneous.

There was more in the report, of course—gruesome details which would not be pleasant reading here, and a leader in the paper founded on the Dangerous Performances Act. It does not, however, affect this matter at all. I knew, as I read, why she had said "Good-by."

Yes, I think that clears up everything.

THE END.

A FAIR FISHER MAID.

With ribbons and rings and fluffy things
  She strolls on the sand slopes brown,
As trig as a yacht and without a spot
  On the folds of her creamy gown.
'Tis scarce the dress of a fisheress,
  Yet thus to be arrayed
Is parcel and part of the subtle art
  Of this fair young fisher maid.

With the tenderest looks she bates her hooks,
  With a seeming sweet and shy,
With the cunning wile of a loving smile,
  And a half withheld reply.
For she hopes to land when he's well in hand,
  And she thinks that he cannot flee,
The biggest fish (oh, modest wish!)
  In the matrimonial sea.

Clinton Scollard.

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THE HAWKINS CRANO-SCALE.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

Some experiences in a coal-bin, with an account of the resolve born of the ignominious method of deliverance therefrom.

I HAD intended it for a peaceful, solitary walk up-town after business on that beautiful Saturday afternoon; and had in fact accomplished the better part of it. I was inhaling huge quantities of the balmy air and reveling in the exhilaration of the exercise.

But passing the picture store, I experienced a queer sensation—perhaps "that feeling of impending evil" we read about in the patent medicine advertisements.

It may have been because I recalled that in that very shop Hawkins had demonstrated the virtues of his infallible Lightning Canvas-Stretcher, and thereby ruined somebody's priceless and unpurchasable Corot.

At any rate, my eyes were drawn to the place as I passed; and, like a cuckoo-bird emerging from the clock, out popped Hawkins.

"Ah, Griggs!" he exclaimed. "Out for a walk?"

"What were you doing in there?"

"Going to walk home?"

"Settling for that painting, eh?"

"Because if you are, I'll go with you," pursued Hawkins, falling into step beside me and ignoring my remarks.

I told Hawkins that I should be tickled to death to have his company, which was a lie and intended for biting sarcasm; but Hawkins took it in good faith and was pleased.

"I tell you, Griggs," he informed me, "there's nothing like this early summer air to fill a man's lungs."

"Unless it is cash to fill his pockets."

"Eh? Cash?" said the inventor. "That reminds me. I must spend some this afternoon."

"Indeed? Going to settle another damage suit?"

"I intend to order coal," replied Hawkins frigidly.

He seemed disinclined to address me further; and I had no particular yearning to hear his voice. We walked on in silence until within a few blocks of home.

Then Hawkins paused at one of the cross streets.

"The coal-yard is down this way, Griggs," he said. "Come along. It won't take more than five or ten minutes."

Now, the idea of walking down to the coal-yard certainly seemed commonplace and harmless. To me it suggested nothing more sinister than a superheated Irish lady perspiring over Hawkins' range in the dog days.

At least, it suggested nothing more at the time, and I turned the corner with Hawkins and walked on, unsuspecting.

Except that it belonged to a particularly large concern, the coal-yard which Hawkins honored by his patronage was much like other coal-yards. The high walls of the storage bins rose from the sidewalk, and there was the conventional arch for the wagons, and the little, dingy office beside it.

Into the latter Hawkins made his way, while I loitered without.

Hawkins seemed to be upon good terms with the coal people. He and the men in the office were laughing genially.

Through the open window I heard Hawkins file his order for four tons of coal. Later some one said: "Splendid, Mr. Hawkins, splendid."

Then somebody else said: "No, there seems to be no flaw in any particular."

And still later the first voice announced that they would make the first payment one week from to-day, at which Hawkins' voice rose with a sort of pompous joy.

I paid very little heed to the scraps of conversation; but presently I paid considerable attention to Hawkins, for

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while he had entered the coal office a well-developed man, he emerged apparently deformed.

His chest seemed to have expanded something over a foot, and his nose had attained an elevation that pointed his gaze straight to the skies.

"Good gracious, Hawkins, what is it?" I asked. "Have they been inflating you with gas in there?"

"I beg pardon?"

"What has happened to swell your bosom? Is it the first payment?"

"Oh, you heard that, did you?" said the inventor, with a condescending smile. "Yes, Griggs, I may confess to some slight satisfaction in that payment. It is a matter of one thousand dollars—from the coal people, you know."

"But what for? Have you threatened to invent something for them, and now are exacting blackmail to desist?"

"Tush, Griggs, tush!" responded Hawkins. "Do make some attempt to subdue that inane wit. I fancy you'll feel rather cheap at hearing that that thousand dollars is the first payment on something I have invented!"

"What!"

"Certainly. I am selling the patent to these people. It is the Hawkins Crano-Scale!"

"Crano-Scale?" I reflected. "What is it? A hair tonic?"

"Now, that is about the deduction your mental apparatus would make!" sneered the inventor.

"But can it be possible that you have constructed something that actually works?" I cried. "And you've sold it—*actually sold it?*"

"I have sold it, and there's no 'actually' about it!"

And Hawkins stalked away through the arch and into the yard beyond.

The idea of one of Hawkins' inventions actually in practical operation was almost too weird for conception. He must be heading for it; and if it existed I must see it.

I followed.

Hawkins strode to the rear of the yard without turning. About us on every side were high wooden walls, the storage bins of the company.

Up the side of one wall ran a ladder, and Hawkins commenced the perpendicular ascent with the same matter-of-fact air that one would wear in walking up-stairs.

"What are you doing that for? Exercise?" I called, when he paused some twenty-five feet in the air.

"If you wish to see the Crano-Scale at work, follow me. If not, stay where you are," replied Hawkins.

Then he resumed his upward course; and having put something like thirty-five feet between his person and the solid earth, he vanished through a black doorway.

Climbing a straight ladder usually sets my hair on end; but this one I tackled without hesitation, and in a very few seconds stood before the door.

In the semi-darkness, I perceived that a wide ledge ran around the wall inside, and that Hawkins was standing upon it, gazing upon the hundreds of tons of coal below, and having something the effect of the Old Nick himself glaring down into the pit.

"There she is!" said the inventor laconically, pointing across the gulf.

I made my way to his side and stared through the gloom. Something seemed to loom up over there.

Presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the change, I perceived the arm of a huge crane, from which was suspended an enormous scoop.

"You mean that mastodonic coal-scuttle?" I inquired.

"Precisely. That's the Hawkins Crano-Scale."

"And what does she do when she—er—crano-scales things, as it were?"

"You'll be able to understand in a moment. That coal-scuttle, as you call it, is large enough to hold four tons. See? Well, the people in the yard are going to want two tons of coal very shortly. What do they do?"

"Take it out, weigh it, and send it," I hazarded.

"Not at all. They simply adjust the controlling apparatus to the two-ton point and set the Crano-Scale going. The scoop dips down, picks up exactly two tons of coal, and rises automatically as soon as the two tons are in. After that the crane swings outward, dumps the coal in the wagon, and there

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you have it—weighed and all! It has been in operation here for one month," Hawkins concluded complacently.

"And no one killed or maimed? No Crano-Scale widows or orphans?"

"Oh, Griggs, you are—— Ha! She's starting!"

The Crano-Scale emitted an ear-piercing shriek. The big steel crane was in motion.

I watched the thing. Gracefully the coal-scuttle dipped into the pile of coal, dug for a minute, swung upward again. It turned, passed through a big doorway in the side, and we could hear the coal rattling into the wagon.

The Crano-Scale returned and swung ponderously in the twilight.

"There!" cried Hawkins triumphantly.

"It works!" I gasped.

"You bet it works!"

"But it must cost something to run the thing," I suggested.

"Well—er—I'm paying for that part," Hawkins acknowledged, "until I've finished perfecting a motor particularly adapted for the Crano-Scale, you see."

I smiled audibly. I think that Hawkins was about to take exception to the smile, but a voice from without bawled loudly:

"Two—tons—nut!"

"Ah, there she goes again!" said the inventor rapturously.

This time the Crano-Scale executed a sudden détour before descending. Indeed, the thing came so painfully near to our perch that the wind was perceptible, and when the giant coal-scuttle had passed and dropped, my heart was hammering out a tattoo.

"I don't believe this ledge is safe, Hawkins," I said.

"Nonsense!"

"But that thing came pretty close."

"Oh, it won't act that way again. Watch! She's dumping into the wagon now! Hear it?"

"Yes, I hear it. I see just what a beautiful success it is, Hawkins—really. Let's go."

"And now she's coming back!" cried the inventor, his eyes glued to the remarkable contrivance. "Observe the ease—the grace—the mechanical poise—the resistless quality of the Crano-Scale's motion! See, Griggs, how she swings!"

I did see how she was swinging. It was precisely that which sent me nearer to the ladder.

The Crano-Scale was returning to position, but with a series of erratic swoops that seemed to close my throat.

The coal-scuttle whirled joyously about in the air—it was receding—no, it was coming nearer! It paused for a second. Then, making a bee-line for our little ledge, it dived.

"Look out, Hawkins!" I cried.

"It's all right," said the inventor.

"But the cursed thing will smash us flat against the wall!"

"Tush! The automatic reacting clutch will——"

The Crano-Scale was upon us! For the merest fraction of a second it paused and seemed to hesitate; then it struck the wall with a heavy bang; then started to scrape its way along our ledge.

The wretched contraption was bent on shoving us off!

"What'll we do?" I managed to shout.

"Why—why—why—why—why——" Hawkins cried breathlessly.

But my course of action had been settled for me. The scoop of the Crano-Scale caught me amidships, and I plunged downward into the coal.

That there was a considerable degree of shock attached to my landing may easily be imagined.

But small coal, as I had not known before, is a reasonably soft thing to fall on; and within a few seconds I sat up, perceived that I was soon to order a new suit of clothes, and then looked about for Hawkins.

He was nowhere in the neighborhood, and I called aloud.

"We—ll?" came a voice from far above.

"Where are you?"

"Hanging—to—the—scoop!" sang out the inventor.

And there, up near the roof, I located him, dangling from the Crano-Scale coal-scuttle!

"What are you going to do next?" I asked, with some interest.

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"I—I—I can't—can't hang on long here!"

"I should say not."

"Well, climb out and tell them to lower the crane!" screamed Hawkins.

I looked around. Right and left, before and behind, rose a mountain of loose coal. I essayed to climb nimbly toward the door which the Crano-Scale had used, and suddenly landed on my hands and knees.

"Are—you—out?" shrieked Hawkins. "I can't stick here!"

"And I can't get out!" I replied.

"Well, you—ouch!"

There was a dull, rattling whack beside me; bits of coal flew in all directions. Hawkins had landed.

"Well!" he exclaimed, sitting up. "I honestly believe, Griggs, that no man was ever born on this earth with less resourcefulness than yourself!"

"Which means that I should have climbed out and informed the people of your plight?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you try it yourself, Hawkins."

The inventor arose and started for the door with a very convincing and elaborate display of indomitable energy. He planted his left foot firmly on the side of the coal pile—and found that his left leg had disappeared in the coal in a highly undignified fashion.

"Humph!" he remarked disgustedly, struggling free and shaking something like a pound of coal dust from his person. "Perhaps—perhaps it's more solid on the other side."

"Try it."

"Well, it is better to try it and fail than to stand there like a cigar-store Indian and offer fool suggestions!" snapped the inventor, making a vicious attack at the opposite side of the pile.

It really did seem more substantial. Hawkins, by the aid of both hands, both feet, his elbows, his knees, and possibly his teeth as well, managed to scramble upward for a dozen feet or so.

But just as he was about to turn and gloat over his success, the treacherous coal gave away once more. Hawkins went flat upon his face and slid back to me, feet first.

When he arose he presented a remarkable appearance.

Light overcoat, pearl trousers, fancy vest—all were black as ink. Hawkins' classic countenance had fared no better.

His lips showed some slight resemblance of redness, and his eyes glared wonderfully white; but the rest of his face might have been made up for a minstrel show.

"Yes, it's devilish funny, isn't it?" he roared, sitting down again rather suddenly as the coal slid again beneath his feet.

"Funny isn't the word. What's our next move to be?"

"Climb out, of course. There must be some place where we can get a foothold."

"Why not shout for help?"

"No use. Nobody could hear us down here. Go on, Griggs. Make your attempt. I've done my part."

"And you wish to see me repeat the performance? Thank you. No."

"But it's the only way out."

"Then," I said, "I'm afraid we're slated to spend the night here."

"Good Lord! We can't do that!"

"I have a notion, Hawkins," I went on, "that we not only can, but shall. You say we can't attract any one's attention, and I guess you're right. Hence, as there is no one to pull us out, and we can't pull ourselves out, we shall remain here. That's logic."

"It's awful!" exclaimed the inventor. "Why, we may not get out tomorrow——"

"Nor the next day, nor the one after that. Exactly. We shall have to wait until this wretched place is emptied, when they will find our bleaching skeletons—if skeletons can bleach in a coal bin."

Hawkins blinked his sable eyelids at me.

"Or we might go to work and pile all the coal on one side of the bin," I continued. "It wouldn't take more than a week or so, throwing it over by handfuls; and when at last they found that your crano-engine wouldn't bring up any more from this side——"

"Aha!" cried the inventor, with sudden animation. "That's it! The Crano-Scale!"

"Yes, that's it," I assented. "Away up near the roof. What about it?"

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"Why, it solves the whole problem," said Hawkins. "Don't you see, the next time they need nut-coal they'll set the engine going, and the scoop——"

"Four—tons—nut, Bill!" said a far-away voice. "Yep. Four tons. Start up that blamed machine."

"What? What did he say?" cried the inventor.

"Something about starting the engine."

"That's what I thought. They're going to use the Crano-Scale, Griggs! We're saved! We're saved!"

"I fail to see it."

"Why, when the thing comes down be ready. Ah—it's coming now! Get ready, Griggs! Get ready! Be prepared to make a dash for it."

"And then?"

"And then climb in, of course. There won't be much room, for they're going to take on four tons, and the thing will be full; but we can manage it. We can do it, Griggs, and be home in time for dinner."

"And you're a fine looking object to go to dinner," I added.

Hawkins' countenance fell somewhat, but there was no time for a reply. The coal-scuttle of the Crano-Scale was hovering above us, evidently selecting a spot for its operations.

"Here! We're right under it!" Hawkins shouted. "This way, Griggs! Quick! Lord! It's coming down—it'll hit you! Quick!"

And I dived toward Hawkins as he was struggling for a foothold, and then——

* * * *

A line of asterisks is the only way of putting into print my state of mind—or absence of any state of mind—for the ensuing quarter of an hour.

My first idea was that some absent-minded person had built a three-story house upon my unhappy body; but I was joggling and bouncing up and down, so that that hypothesis was manifestly untenable.

The weight of the house was there, though, and all about was stifling blackness.

I tried to turn. It was useless. I couldn't move. The house had me pinned down hard and fast.

Then I wriggled frantically, and something near me wriggled frantically as well. Then one of my hands struck something that yielded, and there came a muffled voice from somewhere in the neighborhood.

"Griggs!" it said.

"Yes?"

"W-w-w-where are we? This isn't the coal-bin. Are you hurt?"

"I give it up. Are you?"

"I think not. Why, Griggs, this must be one of the big coal carts!"

"I shouldn't wonder," I assented vaguely.

"But—how——"

"Your miserable coal-scuttle must have stunned us, picked us up, and dumped us in with the coal!" I exclaimed, suddenly enlightened.

"Do—you—think—" came through the blackness. "Huh! It's stopped!"

For a long, long time, as it seemed, there was silence. The weight of coal pressed down until I was near to madness. Hawkins was grunting painfully.

I was speculating as to whether he was actually succumbing—whether I could stand the strain myself for another minute—when everything began to slide. The coal slid, I slid, Hawkins slid—the world seemed to be sliding!

We landed upon the sidewalk. We struggled and beat and threshed at the coal, and finally managed to rise out of it—pitch-black, dazed, and battered.

And the first object which confronted us was the home of Hawkins! We had been delivered at his door, with the four tons of nut-coal.

"They'll have to sign for us on the driver's slip," I remember saying.

That person let off one shriek and vanished down the street. Then the door of the Hawkins home opened, and Mrs. Hawkins emerged, followed by my wife.

That numerous things were said need not be stated. Mrs. Hawkins said most of them, and they were luminous.

Mrs. Griggs limited herself to ruining a fifty-dollar gown by weeping on my coal-soiled shoulder as she implored me never again to tread the same street with Hawkins.

It was a solemn moment, that; for I saw the light. I realized how many

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bumps and bruises and pains and duckings and scorchings might have been spared me, had I taken the step earlier.

But it is never too late to mend. Probably I had still a few years in which to enjoy life.

I turned to Hawkins—a chopfallen, cowering huddle of filth, standing upon two pearl-and-black legs—and said:

"Hawkins, when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one man to sever those friendly bands which have connected him with another, and to assume a station apart, a decent respect for the opinions of the latter usually make it necessary to declare the cause of that separation. It is not so in this case. You know mighty well what you've put me through in the past. There's no need of going into it in detail.

"But this Crano-Scale business is my limit—my outside limit," I went on, "and you've passed it. If you ever attempt to address another word to me, or ride in the same elevated train, or even sit in the same theater, I'll have you arrested as a suspicious person—and locked up for life, if money'll do it! Hawkins, henceforth we meet as strangers!"

And Hawkins, piloted by the unhappy woman who bears his name, walked up the steps, turned, and stared stupidly at me, and then stumbled into the house and out of my life—forever.

NOBODY'S FOOL.

BY JAMES F. DEMERIT.

A matter of money taking wings in the literal sense, and of the desperate expedient to which its loser was driven.

I.

OLD Medbury, of Medbury & Smathers, smote his desk resoundingly with a heavy fist and glared with speechless wrath after the "beanpole" figure of Charlie Jewett as that brisk young man went out of the offices.

Smathers, who knew his senior well, waited for Medbury to get his breath and his power of speech. The present was not a favorable moment for hurrying Mr. Medbury.

Besides, he had overheard most of the conversation between his partner and young Jewett.

When Charlie had come in half an hour before, Smathers had smiled most ingratiatingly upon him. Charlie wore a band of crape upon his arm; there was a little pucker beween his brows; his face seemed to have lost its boyish expression only for a moment.

For it could not be denied that Jewett was young, and that the sudden responsibility of his uncle and guardian's death was a heavy one. Just past his majority, he had not troubled to look into his own affairs until the wire had recalled him from an outing in Canada to attend his uncle's funeral.

And the firm of Horace Jewett & Co. was in a mess. Anybody could see that with half as keen an eye as Charlie's.

Every cent his uncle had possessed, and every cent of his own estate, were tied up in that same firm of commission brokers and shipping agents.

And if Charlie learned this after two weeks' hard work at the firm's books, Medbury & Smathers had known it much longer.

The very night Horace Jewett was stricken in his office with apoplexy, and the news had gone out upon the streets before closing time, Medbury and Smathers had discussed the matter in secret over their dinner.

"It will fall into our laps—it's bound to!" exclaimed Smathers, rubbing his hands together, and the senior partner had nodded ponderously.

So there was reason for Smathers' smile and Medbury's fatherly handclasp when Charlie Jewett walked into the office of the rival house on this morning. The plum was about to fall, and

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the partners' mouths were fairly watering for it.

"Young man, you have suffered a severe loss," said Medbury, playing the heavy father with rather too much unction. "Mr. Horace Jewett was one of the finest men I ever knew. His sudden taking off was a sad blow to me, sir."

For just an instant Charlie looked surprised. He had long known his uncle's opinion of Medbury & Smathers, collectively and together. In a trite phrase, "there was no love lost" between the rival firms.

Charlie was tall and thin, and seemed "white-livered" beside the beefy Mr. Medbury—one of those delicate-looking fellows who appear to be in an advanced stage of consumption, but who are really as wiry as a steel cable.

His clothing fitted him as though it were hung on a pole to air. He would never look impressive with his attenuated body and small, round, pippin-shaped head. But Charlie was "nobody's fool."

"Looks as though a good puff of wind would blow that feller away," Medbury had muttered in Smathers' ear as the young fellow approached the partners' desks at the upper end of the long room.

"And I reckon a good puff in the right direction will blow Horace Jewett & Co. away, too, eh?" chuckled Smathers.

But none of this when Charlie sat down knee to knee with the senior partner. Medbury was as solemn and as compassionate as an undertaker discussing a three hundred dollar job.

"I presume," said Mr. Medbury, "that you have come to me for advice, young man. Horace Jewett's nephew can be sure of a warm welcome *here*."

"Advice?" repeated Charlie, lifting up his chin in that peculiarly aggressive manner which marked him. "Well—no; not exactly. Though I'd be glad of it, of course, when I run against a snag, Mr. Medbury," he added in some haste, seeing the flush rising in the old man's face.

Charlie was a good-natured fellow, and he hated to hurt anybody's feelings.

"What I really came here for was something more practical," he went on. "Uncle Horace had taken some rather long chances in buying sugar against the hope that the government would proclaim the establishment of civil law in the Maccabean Islands. We're liable to have the Sea Raven in here any day now with fifteen thousand or more tons of sugar aboard; and the cargo is likely to cost us a pretty penny in revenue fees.

"Nobody seems to know what the President will do—whether he will issue a proclamation declaring the duties off at once, or will date it ahead a month or two. Sheffield tells me he expects to hear that the Sea Raven has been spoken any day now; so I've got to find money to meet those revenue fees all right."

He said it without the first sign of embarrassment. Medbury's face had gradually taken on a more austere expression.

Mentally, he pronounced the cheek of the young man refreshing. It was plain that Charlie Jewett was a very callow youth indeed.

"Well, sir, what can we do for you?" demanded the old man quite sternly.

"Why, I find out from Sheffield that all you shipping people are in the habit of lending each other credit, or money, from time to time. Uncle Horace has frequently done it. He has, in the past, lent to you."

Charlie seemed to add this because he saw Medbury's features blacken with approaching refusal.

"Young man," said Medbury, "I would do anything possible for my—er—old friend's nephew. Needless to say that, I think. But the lending of money is impossible for the firm of Medbury & Smathers—at present."

"Lend me your name, then," said Charlie calmly. "You know Horace Jewett & Co. has always been good."

"True. But let me point out to you that Horace Jewett is dead. We know nothing about your—er—ability, young man."

"But you know that the sugar on the Sea Raven—and on the ships that are coming after her—is worth so much. Even if they should be lost at sea, the insurance covers their cargoes."

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Medbury shook his fat head decidedly.

"Impossible, young man! Im-pos-si-ble!" he said.

Charlie did not get up. He stretched his legs a little, pulled up his trousers at the knee, and observed casually:

"Well, don't suppose I can blame you, Mr. Medbury. I feel that it is quite a responsibility—this taking the business upon my own shoulders so suddenly. I reckon I can't trade on uncle's good name. I'll have to show what I can do myself."

"Young man," returned the senior partner of Medbury & Smathers sonorously, "you will make a great mistake to seek to carry on a business of which you know nothing—nothing at all! You had better sell out. Indeed——"

Charlie broke in: "Oh, I've got old Sheffield. He's been with uncle twenty years. He's a good adviser."

"In his dotage, sir—in his dotage!" declared Medbury.

"And I'm fresh and new enough to counterbalance his age," said Charlie, with a laugh. "You can't see your way clear to helping me?"

"Not in the way you ask, sir," was the stern reply.

"Then I take it I'll have to call in a loan. Sorry to, but can't help it. I reckon we could have got along for now with six or eight thousand dollars; but Joe Maddern owes us fifteen thousand——"

"*Who?*" exclaimed Medbury, jumping in his chair.

"Joe Maddern. Your son-in-law. He borrowed it four months ago of uncle when you people happened to be a little short. You remember?"

"I—I don't remember," stuttered Medbury with some faintness.

"You'll remember the circumstances when I remind you," Charlie said quietly. "Uncle let Maddern have the money, and he was to get it back on demand at any time after three months. If Joe didn't have it, *you* were to find it, Mr. Medbury."

Medbury hesitated, clearing his throat, not daring to look at his partner.

"Why—why—this is rather unusual, Jewett. Rather an unbusinesslike proceeding, seems to me, if the facts were *just* as you state them. Oh—ah—you have papers to prove this, I suppose?"

"Sir," exclaimed Charlie, throwing up his chin again, his eyes sparkling, "it was a 'gentleman's agreement.'"

"Between your uncle and Maddern—yes, possibly," admitted Medbury.

"And with Medbury & Smathers fully cognizant of the agreement," declared Charlie, controlling his temper. "Sheffield knew it. Uncle knew he should need his money (unless the President got around with his proclamation before) and he had to cover the loan in some way. I feel, Mr. Medbury, that if you put your mind to it you will recall the circumstances quite clearly."

He could not resist this sneer.

Medbury's face vied with an Italian sunset for color. His cheeks puffed out and his little eyes snapped.

"Nobody ever brought a note to Medbury & Smathers that we could not meet, young man. If you have any such paper with our name on it for fifteen thousand, or for any other sum, present it!"

"I have no note with your name on it, Mr. Medbury," said Charlie meekly.

"Then, sir, I bid you good-morning, sir!" exclaimed the old gentleman, with much apparent righteous indignation.

Charlie did not rise. He took a long wallet from his pocket and selected a paper with care, which he held out to Medbury.

"Will you instruct your cashier to pay this, sir, or shall I take it to your bank?"

Medbury's eyes bulged out in astonishment. It was a draft for fifteen thousand, drawn on the firm by Joseph Maddern.

"He asked me to bring it to you instead of taking it to the bank, as he had not warned you," said Charlie softly. "I dropped on him rather suddenly, and he couldn't pay now. This, he said, was according to agreement, and you would meet it without trouble."

The senior partner gasped like an expiring fish. Back in his little mind he thought that he would like to have his precious son-in-law by the neck at that particular minute.

But, then, it was their own fault. They had not taken Joe into their con-

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fidence. Fact was, they had hoped to pick the bones of the Horace Jewett Co. alone. A word to Maddern would have been sufficient, only they would have been obliged to settle with him for letting his note go to protest.

"I—I don't want that draft to go to the bank," stammered Medbury at last. "I'll—I'll make a check for you. It—it's a big sum——"

He had visibly weakened. The shock was too much for him to bluff longer.

"Oh, if it will trouble you any, you can date your check ahead a day or two. We shall have a few hours' grace, even if the Sea Raven gets in to quarantine to-day," said young Jewett. "I know that the credit of Medbury & Smathers is all right."

And five minutes later he bowed to both partners and marched out of the office, a check on the Ironmongers' National Bank in his fist.

It was then that Smathers glanced from his departing beanpole figure to the purple face of Mr. Medbury. An explosion was due in that office when Charlie Jewett closed the door behind him!

II.

MEDBURY'S side remark to his partner seemed particularly pointed on this day, for as young Jewett, with the crisp check in his hand, went out through the swinging doors of the building, a blast of wind right from the bay blew up the tunnel of Broadway and nearly whirled the youngster off his feet.

"Wow!" yelled Jewett, and caught at his hat, which rose an inch or two from his head.

The wind seemed bound to have that hat; but Charlie managed to secure it by a mighty thump, which pretty nearly cracked the derby.

Another man's hat across the street was whirled high in the air, to fall again under the wheels of a clanging car. Charlie burst into a laugh at his own escape and the other fellow's difficulty—a laugh that was cut short in the middle.

It changed, indeed, to a wild yell as he saw something floating above his head.

He had grabbed at his hat with the hand which held the check for fifteen thousand dollars. He had saved the hat, but he had lost the check.

He forgot his own hat, and the fun the crowd were having with the hatless man across the street. He craned his neck to watch the white paper fluttering between his eye and the patch of cloud-flecked sky above the tall buildings.

People began to stop and stare at him. His own hat finally fell off and rolled into the gutter. He never cared less about a hat in all his life.

Up and up the check mounted, diving now and then in a most tantalizing manner, threatening to descend, and then sweeping higher that before.

The amazed and startled young man followed it for half a block, bumping into passers-by, who cursed his awkwardness and who then joined him in craning their necks and trying to see what he evidently saw, high in the air above the traffic of the street.

Past the fourth floor of the buildings it rose, past the fifth, past the sixth—a tiny speck now in the swirling air current which had seized it like a hungry bird of prey.

Jewett's eyes watered and blinked. A particle of dust flew viciously into one of them, but he dared not even wink it out.

Higher—higher—higher——

"Jupiter Ammon!" gasped Jewett. "It's gone!"

It was true. The check on the Ironmongers' National Bank, drawn to his order by Medbury & Smathers, was completely out of sight. One hears of money taking wings; it had literally done so in this case!

Jewett was considerably excited. He rushed into the tall building beside which the soaring check had disappeared and took the hall-man into his confidence.

He had lost sight of the check somewhere about the seventh or eighth floor. It might have been wafted into an office window.

The hall-man became excited, too, at the mention of the figures on the check. They went up in the elevator and made inquiries in the offices on every floor above the sixth. Then they searched the roof.

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Half an hour later the young man came back to the street in gloomy mind. The check was not to be found.

There was nothing left for it but to go back to Medbury & Smathers and report his loss. Jewett realized the feeling in which that firm held him; he hated to appear before old man Medbury again.

Medbury was just leaving the office. Indeed, he was starting South on a long trip, partly for pleasure, partly on business.

A messenger boy carried his grip and waited in the corridor for him while Charlie Jewett poured out his tale of woe.

Medbury's little eyes snapped, but he hid their sparkle behind heavy lids.

"Too bad! Too bad!" he clucked, rubbing his bald brow. "Mustn't have that check flying 'round another instant without having it stopped. You run right over to the bank and 'tend to it, young man; that's what *you* must do."

It did not enter Jewett's head at the moment that the quickest way would be for Medbury & Smathers to telephone to the Ironmongers' National Bank. He ran over to the bank as suggested.

He felt like a fool. It was such a "kid" thing to do—letting a fifteen thousand dollar check blow away from one!

The bank people looked at him in a most suspicious manner when he told them. He didn't even know the number of the check, having forgotten to find that out.

And on top of all this he would have to go to the firm drawing the check and beg them to draw another at once, for the Sea Raven might swoop down upon New York at any time now with her cargo of sugar, and the bank balance of Horace Jewett & Co. was mighty low!

"This thing can't be delayed," thought Charlie, hurrying out of the bank. "I'll have to see Medbury & Smathers again and get them to issue another check at once. Suppose that ship should be reported to-day——"

He bought a paper of the first newsboy. It was an early afternoon edition, and there upon the first page, headed by huge black type, an article smote his sight.

The President had finally made up his mind. He had signed the proclamation relating to the establishment of civil rule in the Maccabean Islands.

For an instant Jewett's heart leaped with delight; then it sank with equal rapidity. It was still a week before the law would become operative, and the Sea Raven would surely drop her anchor in quarantine before that date.

After having carried matters with such a high hand on his first visit to the rival firm that morning, it was very hard to return this third time. So his feet lagged as he entered the building in which the offices of Medbury & Smathers were situated.

The desks of both partners were closed, and he presented himself before that of the cashier.

"Mr. Medbury? Why, sir, he's gone away. Didn't you know that he was just starting when you were in here half an hour ago? Going South; he'll be gone two or three weeks, sure."

"Well, where's Mr. Smathers?" asked Jewett, rather glad that the senior partner was out of the way.

He did not know Smathers; in fact, he had scarcely glanced at the junior partner while talking with Medbury. But he thought Smathers would be easier to face in this emergency.

"Where's Mr. Smathers?" the cashier asked a neighboring clerk.

"Gone out, sir."

"When will he be back?" queried the eager Jewett.

Inquiry was made of several persons. Finally the stenographer said that he believed Mr. Smathers had been called away hurriedly by a telegram soon after Mr. Medbury left.

The cashier knew nothing about the check, except that the bank people had called the firm up, and he had told them the number upon the lost bit of paper.

"Oh, the check will be stopped all right, Mr. Jewett," the cashier assured him. "Very sorry you should have had the misfortune to lose it."

"But, by Jove," exclaimed Charlie desperately, "I may need the money—or some of it—in a hurry. I'll have to have another check."

"You must see Mr. Smathers about that, sir. He'll probably be in after lunch."

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So the young man went back to his own office in a much perturbed frame of mind. He did not care to take even old Sheffield, his uncle's cashier, into his confidence.

So he said nothing about the loss of the check. Smathers knew all about it, and of course Smathers wouldn't be mean enough to refuse him another one when the case was so urgent.

The affairs of Horace Jewett & Co. were really in a bad way—only he and Sheffield knew how bad; even the astute Medbury had not guessed how terribly mixed up the elder Jewett's books were.

To ask their bank for a loan was quite impossible; the books of the firm were not clean enough to show, and Charlie could not trade upon the credit of a dead man. He knew that.

"Jupiter Ammon!" he exclaimed. "If the President had only made this new law operative from the start, we'd have a chance, even if Medbury & Smathers should cut up nasty about the check. I could almost wish for an offshore gale that would drive the Sea Raven out to sea again!"

It was with a well-defined premonition of disaster that he entered the offices of the rival firm again after two o'clock. Smathers' desk, as well as Medbury's, was still closed.

"Mr. Jewett," exclaimed the cashier, who had evidently just got in from his own luncheon, and looked somewhat disturbed, "this is a most exasperating affair. Mr. Smathers has just had the office on the 'phone.

"He has been called out of town. He gave the clerk here some instructions for me, but the clerk forgot to mention the matter of your check, and Mr. Smathers evidently forgot it, too. He's starting for Albany on a—er—private matter, he said."

Charlie knew that he must have turned pale, but he managed to control his voice.

"When will he return?"

"I can't tell you. We'll hear to-morrow from him, of course."

"And Medbury has positively started South?" asked the young man huskily.

"Oh, sir, the Dominion Liner, Maracaibo, sailed at eleven o'clock."

"Where was Smathers when he telephoned you?"

"Somewhere up-town. He was just starting for the train."

Without another word Jewett turned on his heel and rushed from the building. He found a cab near the side door of the Astor House, and the driver made probably the best time of his life to Forty-Second Street.

Jewett knew that if Smathers was going to Albany when he telephoned to his office, he could not yet have left. The afternoon express was backing into the station when the cab deposited Jewett at the door.

The young fellow ran into the waiting-room and eagerly glanced over the crowd assembled there. Not until then did it strike him that he might have some difficulty in identifying the junior partner of Medbury & Smathers.

He had never seen the man but once and then scarcely glanced at him. His impressions regarding the fellow's appearance were very vague indeed.

He inquired of a uniformed employee of the railroad company the location of the Albany train. The gate was just being opened, and Jewett pushed into the crowd about it, eying closely each man who passed.

Suddenly he caught sight of an individual hurrying forward with a dress-suit case. He was a short man, with lean features and a nervous manner.

As Jewett remembered him, this man answered the description of Mr. Smathers.

As he approached he caught sight of Charlie's tall figure and half stopped. The young man stepped forward.

"Mr. John L. Smathers?" he inquired.

The man looked at him and shrewdly saw the doubt in Jewett's own face.

"No—no, sir!" he exclaimed, seeking to brush by. "You have made a mistake."

But at that Jewett was convinced, and he laid a hand lightly upon the other's arm.

"Pardon me, sir; but you are his double, then!" he declared, with vigor. "You look exactly like Mr. Smathers."

"That may be—that may be!" exclaimed the other tartly. "I—I'm

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often taken for him," he blurted out, and then, wrenching himself free, hurried through into the train shed.

The denial staggered Jewett for a breath; then he sprang forward to follow, but was stopped by the man at the gate. "Ticket, sir? Where are you going?"

Smathers—or his double—had held *his* ticket in his hand. Jewett saw him hurry aboard the train as he himself was pushed aside by other passengers.

"The scoundrel!" thought the young man. "It's a scheme to cripple me. I don't believe he was called to Albany at all. I doubt even if Medbury has gone South. They're determined to get me in a hole—confound 'em!

"But that's Smathers—I know it is. And I'll prove it, too," he exclaimed, with sudden inspiration.

He ran to the telegraph office. There he wrote on a blank: "I must have another check in place of the one lost. Will you instruct cashier to write it at once? Charles Jewett." This he sealed in an envelope, hired a messenger, and sent him through the train calling Mr. Smathers' name.

Meanwhile he pushed his way through another gateway into the train-shed and hurried to the track on which the Albany express stood. The moment for the train's starting was now at hand.

He walked swiftly down the platform, peering in at the windows of the cars. He saw the messenger boy enter one of the parlor cars, hold up the envelope, and heard him bawl: "Telegram for Mr. John L. Smathers!"

"There he is!" almost shouted Jewett.

He saw the little man he had accosted jump up and reach for the envelope. The train began to move. The boy darted out of the car and leaped off, and before Jewett could gain presence of mind enough to board the train himself, the end car had passed him.

"But the rascal got my message. He can't deny it. I can prove it by the boy," Jewett thought. "Now if he doesn't send in word to-morrow for his cashier to make me another check, I'll know it's a plant.

"I was a fool to lose the confounded thing, but if Medbury & Smathers were gentlemen they would help me out of my difficulty."

He returned sadly to his own office, and as he entered old Sheffield was just turning away from the telephone booth.

"Mr. Jewett," the cashier exclaimed, "I'm glad you've come. I've just heard——"

"From Medbury & Smathers?" finished Charlie eagerly.

"Why, no, sir," returned the old man in some surprise. "I telephoned down to the ship news office to inquire about the Sea Raven. The Biglow liner, Balboa, is just in, and reports speaking the Sea Raven three days ago. She ought to be in quarantine to-morrow."

III.

THAT night when the office of Horace Jewett & Co. closed, Charlie felt that somehow he had put on twenty years since it opened in the morning. The final hours of the afternoon had been spent by Sheffield and himself in canvassing the possibilities of the situation from every side.

Had the Sea Raven been a week later, she would have been the firm's salvation. Horace Jewett & Co. was the consignee of the Sea Raven's cargo, and the owners of the ship would demand her hold cleared at once.

But before that sugar could be unloaded it must be appraised by the government inspectors, and means must be found for the payment of the heavy duties then levied upon Maccabean sugar.

It was plain that Medbury & Smathers intended to block Jewett if possible.

Medbury was at sea, and Smathers had escaped him. Charlie knew that, in law, he would have no redress until sufficient time had elapsed after the loss of the check.

Medbury & Smathers had a perfect right to refuse to sign another until every effort was made for the recovery of the one which had, like a veritable money bird, taken to itself wings and flown away.

"And they'll do it, Mr. Charlie," declared old Sheffield. "Mean as it is, Medbury & Smathers will do it. They've been after our trade too many years to miss this opportunity.

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"They know about how we stand. They hold some of your uncle's paper, in fact. Your uncle was a great man for taking long chances, and you can't go to his friends for help, for they don't know you."

"Well, there's no use telling me that," grunted the young man as he parted from the faithful clerk on the corner.

He walked up-town, scarcely noticing the people whom he passed, or the flight of time. Suddenly he halted, still in a brown study, upon a corner.

It was a fair and beautiful evening. No chance of a storm arising and driving the Sea Raven back upon her course. To-morrow she would be at quarantine, would be passed in all probability by the health officers within an hour or two, and would be docked before night.

The cargo was actually mortgaged up to the last dollar's worth, the mortgagee being secured by the insurance. His uncle had depended upon the several cargoes following in the wake of the Sea Raven, with which to "make good" if, as had happened, the President did not establish civil rule in the Maccabean Islands in time.

Charlie Jewett saw that unless a miracle intervened he could easily count the hours before the notice of "Failure" was pasted upon the outside of the door of Horace Jewett & Co.

As he stood there, the current of humanity flowing past him in either direction, an idea began dimly to take form in his troubled mind—an idea so wild and reckless that he glanced about him, startled, wondering if anybody could read his thoughts in the expression of his clouded face.

Finally he wheeled around, and, gradually hastening his steps, retraced his way to the office. As he passed the building before which the check had been caught up by the wind, he shook his fist at the pile of granite.

He had hounded the superintendent of the building, and the hall-men, that afternoon; but no word of the lost check had he received.

Soon he arrived at his office and opened the door again with his private key. He first saw that the shades were drawn, and then turned on a single bulb of light before the big safe behind Sheffield's desk.

He felt like a thief as he twirled the knob and heard the tumblers click in the combination lock.

When the doors were open he drew forth the cash-box and stuffed the contents into his pockets.

Then he looked up the balance to the firm's account at the bank. He filled out a check covering almost every penny of this sum.

Five minutes later he was out on the street and hurrying toward the North River piers.

He reached the office of the towing company his firm often patronized before the lights were out. But it was late, and most of the tugboat crews had gone home.

"I tell you I've got to have a sea-going tug," Jewett informed the acting manager of the concern. "It is important. I must meet the Sea Raven before she is sighted from Sandy Hook. Put me aboard of her, and that's all I'll ask."

A cash offer—a price that was twice what the job was really worth—finally tempted the towing company. At eight o'clock the tug, General Grantham, swung out from the pier and left a white wake behind her as she started for the Narrows.

The captain of the tug offered Jewett the use of his own stateroom; but the young man could not sleep. He could not sit down; he could not rest for a moment, but paced the deck and began to peer seaward through the starlit night long before the General Grantham passed the Hook.

They spoke plenty of incoming craft; but a barkentine answering the description of the Sea Raven was not among them. The farther offshore they steamed, the greater the danger of their passing the incoming sugar vessel without seeing her.

By and by the General Grantham began to travel in great circles. The lights of every sailing vessel bigger than a fishing schooner were investigated. The night grew old, the stars paled, and still the Sea Raven did not appear.

Could she have slipped by them?

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Was it possible that the Sandy Hook signal station had already sighted her and wired the fact to the city? Was she, like a bird of evil omen, creeping in toward quarantine, while the tug ranged the sea for her, far out here?

Charlie's face grew haggard. If he missed her, his last hope of pulling the firm of Horace Jewett & Co. out of a hole was gone!

The coming dawn snuffed out the stars altogether. There was an hour of gray light, when it was harder to distinguish objects on the sea than before.

Suddenly the lights of a vessel glimmered far in the distance. They went out in a little while, for the craft was nearer the sunrise, and some careful officer of the deck had "doused the glims."

The tug ran out blindly, on the chance of hitting this vessel's vicinity.

There was very little breeze, and a light mist began to rise from the face of the ocean. This fog rose mast high, and Charlie groaned aloud. They could not distinguish objects clearly half a mile away.

The mist opened like a curtain to let the puffing tug pass, but dropped behind it again in a most depressing manner. Before, behind, on either hand, the tug was encompassed with the smothering folds.

Suddenly a sound caught the ear of the anxious young man—a sound that rose above the panting of the tug. It was the creak of heavy spars being squared to a favoring breeze.

Through the lighter mist above, the upper rigging of a vessel appeared. The captain of the General Grantham, who stood in the little wheelhouse forward, glanced down at Jewett and waved his hand.

The latter shaded his eyes, devouring the tangle of rigging and spars which seemed to tower heavenward.

Then the sun broke through the mist and sent a long red beam through the ship's upperworks. It was a barkentine! Ten minutes later they could see her decks, and soon the tug hailed her.

"We don't want a tow 'way out here!" yelled the vessel's commander from the quarter. "Yes, this is the Sea Raven, from the Maccabean Islands."

"The consignee of your cargo wants to come aboard," the tug captain informed him, and then the General Grantham ran in under the high rail of the barkentine, and Charlie Jewett climbed tremblingly up the rope ladder which was let down to him.

But the battle was not yet won. From the captain of the barkentine down, no man aboard wished the voyage prolonged. Ready money, however, will accomplish much, and if Jewett had impoverished the cash-box of the firm, it was in a good cause.

Word went back to Sheffield by the tug, and for six days the Sea Raven stood "off and on" almost within sight of Sandy Hook. And aboard of her was a certain tall young man who spent those six days in the agony of *mal de mer;* Charlie Jewett was no sailor.

He went ashore upon the Health Department boat from quarantine, a physical wreck, but with the satisfaction of knowing that he had saved his firm.

When he reached the office, however, and found that the hall-man of the skyscraper on Broadway had found the lost check in the mouth of a ventilator on the roof, and that it had been deposited by Sheffield to the firm's account not more than an hour or two after he had boarded the Sea Raven, Charlie Jewett felt, somehow, that he had had his labor for his pains!

"YOU CAN SEARCH ME."

THE phrase trips lightly to the tongue;
'Tis one you almost everywhere will hear,
Except from ocean travelers when they meet
The customs men upon the pier.

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IN THE UPPER LEFT ENTRANCE.

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

A story of the stage, confined chiefly to the wings, where a strange romance, with an accidental ending, was enacted.

THERE were two things that thus far all Stella Marvin's wealth had not been able to procure for her. One of these was beauty, the other admission to that enchanted region known as "behind the scenes."

It must not be understood from this that Stella was either an unattractive girl or stage struck. She was simply possessed with a desire to be strikingly handsome, and to see just what the actors did when the descending curtain hid them from the public's eye.

Having now reached the age of twenty-three, she had abandoned the hope of beauty, and the desire to gratify her other ambition was by so much increased. And yet, much the simpler proposition as this seemed, there were still "giants in the path," as it were.

Up to the present winter, Stella had always lived in the country. Inheriting her fortune from one aunt, she had taken another aunt to live with her at a pretty apartment in New York, where they knew absolutely no one. Their theatergoing had been confined, in consequence, to matinées, but by dint of a careful perusal of the amusement columns, Stella contrived to get in no fewer than three of these a week, sometimes four.

Her evenings she spent in reading theatrical papers and magazines, and pasting up her program-book. It was in midspring that she made her great discovery.

She and Aunt Hetty had gone to a matinée at the Fortune Theater. The play was a romantic historical affair, and as soon as she picked up the bill of it Stella gave a little gasp.

"Aunt Hetty," she whispered, "look there! Frank Harwin! Don't you remember the little fellow I used to play with at Old Orchard Beach? Why, he was the prince in the tableau of the Sleeping Beauty we did in the hotel parlor. And to think that he should have become an actor, after all! He always declared that was his one ambition."

After that her excitement was intense, and when Harwin finally made his entrance she held on to the sides of her chair to keep from leaping out of it.

"Yes, I am sure it is he, Aunt Hetty. Isn't he handsome? Of course he has changed a lot; men are expected to between thirteen and—thirty. He must be nearly that now. I wonder if he would remember me. It would be fine, wouldn't it, to talk over the old days with him?"

"But, my dear Stella," interjected her aunt, "remember that he is an actor."

"Of course, and that is why I don't want to forget. Why, it seems almost too good to be true. I am sure he can arrange for me to get my peep behind the scenes at last. You must come, too, Aunt Hetty, for chaperon."

Feebly the good lady endeavored to protest, but she was as clay in the hands of her niece, who was not above reminding her that it was she—Stella—who had raised the good lady from drudgery in a farm-house to the fat of the land in a Manhattan flat.

As soon as she reached home, Stella sat down at her desk and wrote as follows:

MY DEAR MR. HARWIN:

Have you by chance forgotten our childhood days together at Old Orchard? I did not know what had become of you until I saw you at the theater this afternoon. Aunt Harriet died and left me her money, so I have brought Aunt Hetty down here to help me spend it. Don't you want to come and congratulate me on my good luck?

It seems odd to be writing you in such formal fashion, but you see, I am trying to remember that we have not seen each other in fifteen years. Of course I don't

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expect you to recall as much about the past as I do. A man's life is always so much fuller than a woman's. Yet somehow I don't think you have changed much. You have grown into just the sort of looking man I fancied you would that night you played the *Prince* to my *Sleeping Beauty*. But I warn you I am as far from being really this, sleeping or waking, as I ever was.

Hoping you will let me know what afternoon you can drop in for tea, I remain, in happy memory of the days of old,

STELLA MARVIN.

After the foregoing was dropped in the mail box, time seemed to pass on leaden wings to the writer, and finally she began to fear either that she had made a horrible mistake or else that her old-time comrade was deliberately ignoring her. But at length an answer came, written on the paper of one of the two actors' clubs:

MY DEAR MISS MARVIN:

So you have found me out! It is awfully nice of you not to wish to ignore your old friend because he has turned actor-man. I have been snubbed in so many directions since I have gone on the stage that it was like a breath of the air of dear Old Orchard to get your note.

I should so love to come to you and take tea, but my afternoons are all taken up with rehearsals. You see, we are constantly breaking in new people, and that keeps us all at work. But I wonder if you cannot get your Aunt Hetty to bring you behind next Wednesday matinée. I have a long wait in the second act. Come about three and ask for me at the stage door.

Hoping to see you then,

Cordially yours,

FRANK HARWIN.

Stella went about on air, as it were, for the next few days. This was more than she had dared hope for—so soon.

But Aunt Hetty experienced many trepidations. She had had many scruples of conscience regarding her presence in the front of the theater; to go back seemed to her like bearding Satan in his very den. But, as usual, she gave in to Stella's superior will, and promptly at three the following Wednesday the two were standing, the one trembling from fear, the other a-shiver with excitement, in front of the tiny entrance that gave admittance to the place of mysteries.

An old man with a forbidding countenance took the card Stella extended to him, but as soon as she had said it was to be carried in to Mr. Harwin his face relaxed, and he bade both ladies step inside the little box of a place which served as his headquarters.

Beyond came the sound of voices from the stage, and an instant later Harwin appeared, both hands outstretched and an effusive greeting on his lips.

"It was so good of you to want to know me still," he exclaimed. "Would you have recognized me without my name on the bill?" he added in an undertone, as he led them to the rear of the stage and gave them seats in a gondola that had been used in the first act.

"What a question!" laughed Stella. "Why, you were only a boy then. But where have you been all these years, and what has become of your sister? Just think, I have heard absolutely nothing of you for—well, longer than I care to reckon up."

"Is that so?" and there was an eager edge to Harwin's tone; then he added: "We must keep our voices down, Stella, or we shall receive a reprimand from the stage director. I may call you Stella, may I not? When you think what we were to each other once, it seems absurd to be formal now. I know you always think of me as 'Frank.' Come now, don't you?"

His voice had sunk almost to a whisper, just heard above a waltz the orchestra was playing for a ball-room scene that was going on a few feet away from them. Aunt Hetty's eyes were riveted to the painted men and women passing to and fro, sometimes even brushing against her gown. She seemed oblivious to all else.

"I can't realize yet, Frank, that it is really you," Stella replied.

She was ecstatically happy, not because she had fallen thus swiftly in love with the boy beside her who had now become a man, but from her environment—the realization of her dreams. She saw none of the tawdry side of the place—it was as though

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everything was covered with that deceiving mask which it is the province of the stage to supply.

"He is much handsomer than I thought he would be," she told herself, as he turned for an instant to speak to her aunt. "But just as nice as in the old days."

After they had gone, she realized how considerate he had been in not introducing them to any one of his companions. They were all of the stage stagey; him they had known before. Yes, he *was* a gentleman, and she was glad she had written that note.

He promised to call on Sunday, but a few minutes before the hour at which she expected him appeared a messenger boy with a note saying that an unexpected trial of a new player would interfere. Could she not come with her aunt to the theater at the next Wednesday matinée?

She could and did, spending another hour of delightful chat aboard that gondola in the upper left entrance.

"I don't believe you ever intend coming to see me, Frank," she said, as they parted just before he went on for the last act. "Why can't you dine with us some night? We can fix it for any hour you set."

"Because, my dear Stella, we people of the stage can never count on having our time our own, except for these waits during the performance. I know it seems strange for me to see you only in this way, but your aunt is surely a sufficient chaperon, and the end of the season will soon be here, when we can drive and walk to our heart's content in God's blessed world, away from the limelight."

How handsome he looked as he said this! And he knew she liked to come. Stella began to fear that she was falling in love.

But there was no Mrs. Grundy to say her nay. Nobody she knew except Aunt Hetty, and *she* had already been wound around Frank's little finger.

Six visits the two had paid the theater in this way, always remaining just the hour of Harwin's long wait. Stella knew that the rest of the company had begun to talk about the thing, but, strengthened by Aunt Hetty's presence, she did not care. Besides, she and Frank were so friendly now, and he was such an old friend, really the oldest friend she had, that there seemed nothing out of the way in it.

It was on the seventh visit, early in June, two weeks before the season ended, that Harwin proposed to her, a proposal spoken under cover of that seductive waltz, she seated in the gondola, he bending over her in that becoming knight's suit, a plume in his velvet cap, a sword swinging by his side.

And when Stella whispered a soft "Yes, Frank" to his pleading, he had added: "And let's make it wholly romantic and be married some afternoon just before we go away. In the chapel that is used for the last set, after the final curtain. What do you say, dear?"

What could Stella's sentimental nature say but yes to so enticing a prospect? And Frank kissed her the next minute under cover of the dark change.

"Aunt Hetty," she began, as they walked away from the place a few minutes later, "I am engaged. I dare say you are not surprised."

But Aunt Hetty *was* surprised, and, turning to look into her niece's face, made a misstep, wrenched her ankle, and sank to the sidewalk—helpless.

They had gone but a very short distance from the theater.

"I'll go for Frank," said Stella at once. "He can carry you into a carriage, and up-stairs when we get home."

And she flew back and through the stage door, calling out that she must see Mr. Harwin at once.

"Yonder he is, miss," said the electrician, and Stella recognized the suit at once. He had his back to her at the moment, on the point of entering his dressing room. The man called his name, he turned, and Stella uttered a little scream.

The face was that of a man past fifty, seamed and wrinkled. As soon as he saw her he tried to dodge back into the room, but it was too late.

"Who are you?" she demanded, going up to him and catching him by one of the slashed sleeves she had grown so to admire. "You are never the Frank Harwin I used to know. What does this mean?"

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He tried to take her hand, but she drew back, the repulsion showing plainly in her face. The removal of his make-up, without which he had taken pains she should never see him, lifted a veil from her eyes.

In a flash she realized the narrow escape she had had. This man—this utter stranger—would have married her for her money, and let her find out the truth when it was too late.

She never stopped to explain why she had returned, and with only the faint echo of his words, "It was only a joke," ringing in her ears, she flew back to her aunt and relied on a policeman and a cabby to get the old lady home.

"So that's why he always changed the conversation when I asked him about his family," she told herself when she had time calmly to review the situation. "And I suppose Frank Harwin just happened to be the stage name he took. What a gaby he must have thought me. Well, I guess I was. And I wondered why he never came to tea."

As soon as Aunt Hetty's injured foot would permit traveling, the two went to Old Orchard Beach. Stella did not look for the name of Frank Harwin on the register. Whether she met the real bearer of it or not cannot be set down here, as these lines are written before the summer ends. But, after all, to fall in with the real one would be no stranger than her experiences during her brief acquaintance with the Harwin in masquerade.

The Shrewdness of McCormick Ryan.

BY WILLIAM HEYLIGER.

A tale of Gleason's Elixia of Life waters, and how they were boomed.

TWICE Major Ike Gleason bombarded a distant cuspidor with a stream of tobacco juice, and twice I marveled at the exactness of his aim. Then that citizen of the world, that ex-soldier and man of affairs, spoke.

"I overheard two gentlemen talking to-day," he said slowly. "They were discussing Wall Street and the prominent men that sink of iniquity contains. They seemed to think that Rockefeller, Morgan, Gates, and the rest of them were little giants of finance. I pitied those gabblers, sir, from the bottom of my heart I pitied them."

I held my peace and waited. Major Ike chewed savagely on his flowing mustache.

"You should have known McCormick Ryan," he continued. "In an age of satellites he was a planet, but the dark clouds of adversity settled around him and obscured his brightness. Those who knew him personally respected him; those who knew him only through his work remembered him.

"It was impossible to forget McCormick Ryan. For a while he gleamed through the West like a guiding star; then, from the black depths of faithlessness in one's fellow man, science reached out an investigating, incredulous hand, and McCormick passed."

Major Ike's breast heaved. I lit a cigar.

"I met him," he went on, "in San Francisco. He was breezy, sir, remarkably breezy. He bumped into me on the steps of our hotel, he apologized, and the next moment he invited me to join him in a tour of the town.

"Perhaps he recognized in me a kindred spirit, perhaps he reasoned that two can live, or drink, as cheaply as one. We started out with high hats, we returned with only the rims, and late in the morning we awoke in each other's arms."

"Quite lovingly," I commented.

"Ah," sighed Major Ike, "he was a loving man, cursed with the love of his neighbor. He had traveled over most of the world, and everywhere he had seen a goodly quota of the sick and the ailing.

"His heart was touched. He was a believer in lithia water—lithia water

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for the sick and for the well, for the young and for the old, for diseases that were known and for diseases that were unknown. And why not? he argued. Lithia water in itself was good for the kidneys. Add a little turpentine, and it could also be used as a liniment; add a little wild cherry, and it would partake of the nature of a couch syrup. The different combinations were as limitless as the different kinds of diseases, and the plans of McCormick Ryan were as limitless as either.

"The world was sick, and the world desired to be cured. With tears of sympathy in his eyes, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, McCormick Ryan resolved that he would cure."

In some distant tower a clock struck ten. Major Ike pulled his mustache and stared off into space.

"He was a philanthropist," he said at last, "and a philanthropist of the highest order of benevolence. He offered me a half partnership, and I accepted. I was to look after the manufacturing, and he was to see that Gleason's Elixia of Life was brought before the public notice.

"If he were alive to-day, sir, he would be kept busy declining offers to become dean of this and that correspondence school of Applied Publicity. As an advertiser he was a gem of the very first water.

"In bar-rooms he endorsed Gleason's Elixia of Life as an antidote for the morning after; on the docks of the Pacific Steamship Company he told prospective travelers of the numerous cases of seasickness from which it had saved him. In a week all San Francisco was talking of the new remedy; in a month they were buying it by the barrel.

"McCormick took a suite of rooms in the best hotel, and still continued to preach its virtues. Was he connected with the company that put it on the market? Lord, no, and calling a bell-boy, McCormick Ryan would order a bottle for himself. That was his style, sir.

"A hundred times I implored him to allow his name to stand with mine as the makers of the medicine, and a hundred times he firmly refused. He despised egotism, he said; and besides, it was harder for the hand of vengeance to fall upon two than upon one.

"He was without guile, sir, without a spark of worldliness. He spoke of vengeance when another would have looked for fame. He allowed his light to be hidden under a bushel."

"Such men are rare in these days," I ventured.

"Yes," he said slowly, "as rare as schemes such as the one which climaxed his career. We were in San Francisco when the arrangements for the Democratic convention of '96 were made, and to Chicago McCormick decided we should go. Gleason's Elixia of Life was unknown to the world at large; he was resolved to make it a household name.

"He was ambitious, sir, deeply ambitious, but only ambitious for the public good. He left me one morning with a choking request to watch the people's health while he was gone, and five days later I received a letter telling me to come on with a supply of the medicine.

"I found him in a little cottage nestling in the Chicago suburbs. A smile was on his face, that smile of benevolence I knew so well. He hated to deceive the public, he said, but the public were indifferent to Gleason's Elixia of Life. He had worked for years to redeem the world's health, and he was resolved that no pork-packing city should be an obstacle in his path toward success.

"Some men, he remarked, were born healthy, some achieved health, while with others it was necessary to thrust health upon them. McCormick Ryan was prepared to thrust.

"Next day the convention was called to order, and exhaling Democracy, McCormick Ryan fought for a seat in the gallery, and mingled with the common herd.

"From the moment he entered he became a figure of importance. He first attracted attention by taking off his coat and tearing out the sleeves; then he took off one of his shoes, and with true Celtic aim shied it at the delega-

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tion from New Jersey. Accounts differ as to what happened after that, but in the end an ambulance took McCormick Ryan to the hospital, with two policemen sitting on his chest."

"Was he crazy?" I asked.

"Yes," said Major Ike, "he was crazy, but crazy, sir, only for the public health. The Chicago evening papers spoke of the lunatic in the convention, and the morning papers added that all through the night he tossed about on his cot, calling wildly for Gleason's Elixia of Life.

"Correspondents wired the story to their papers, and in another day the West was talking of nothing but the wild man and his cry for Elixia of Life. A professor from Central University took McCormick in hand and pronounced him insane; a physiologist from Denver promptly called the University man a liar.

"On the third day of the discussion a San Francisco editor telegraphed his correspondent that Gleason's Elixia of Life was a local remedy, and that the manufacturer had gone to Chicago. That afternoon I called on the chief of police."

Major Ike shifted in his seat and cleared his throat.

"They took me to McCormick Ryan," he said at length. "While they held him I poured some of Gleason's Elixia of Life down his throat. The effect was magical. Thrusting the attendants from him, he sat up, stared blankly around the room a moment, and then dropped back and went to sleep. He was a genius, sir, was McCormick Ryan.

"The next morning the professor examined him and declared him sane, while the gentleman from Denver, taking another peep, discovered traces of insanity. It was a pretty tangle, sir, a pretty tangle, and the newspapers made the most of it. In the end, however, McCormick Ryan was discharged from custody, and arm in arm he and the Denver man went off to dinner. I started back for San Francisco.

"After one adventure of that kind, most men would have given up in despair, but not so McCormick Ryan. His one desire was to let people know of Gleason's Elixia of Life, and from Chicago to the coast every paper spoke editorially of his miraculous cure.

"He was interviewed and photographed, and dined by medical men, and the sales of the Elixia increased one thousand fold. Then came a report that a scientific society was about to investigate the medicine. Two days later McCormick appeared in San Francisco.

"'It's all up,' he said pathetically. 'They say the remedy is common water, doctored with a few herbs. Of course it's false, but the people like to be humbugged. They'll believe it. We had better move.'

"There were tears in his eyes, sir, tears of genuine regret. While he remained in the office I went to the different banks and drew out our money. In all, there were forty thousand dollars. I gave it to him for safekeeping, and he came to my hotel to spend the night.

"When I awoke in the morning, McCormick Ryan was gone, but a note was on my pillow. He had been robbed during the night, he wrote; he did not have the courage to face me. Grief was eating away his heart.

"As I read, in imagination I could see him going down the years to come, his spirit broken, his philanthropic soul torn by anguish. That my loss would be the principal cause of his regret I did not doubt. He was a man, sir, admirable in his triumphs, but glorious in his defeats. This was one of his defeats.

"Two years ago I learned that he was dead, and, bowing my head, I shed a tear in memory of the noblest, most self-sacrificing man I have ever known. Rockefeller is only a millionaire. If McCormick Ryan had had his opportunities he would have owned the earth. He was a financial genius."

The tower clock struck eleven. Major Ike Gleason rose to go.

"He was shrewd," I admitted.

"Shrewd!" Major Ike turned to stare. "Gad, I should say he was! He was forty thousand shrewd, twenty of which was mine."

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